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"FILL her up?" inquired the filling station man. He began vigorously to swab our windshield.

"Might as well," agreed Barry Starr, as he noted that the posted price was only seventeen cents per gallon. "This is the fork, isn't it," pursued Starr, "where we turn off for Hillhaven?"

"Yep, turn to the left here. Hillhaven's ten miles down the ridge. A queer business there last night, eh? Did you hear about it?"

"Yes, we heard about it. That's why we're going there. I'm Starr, assistant district attorney."

I noted that Barry's interest had been arrested by the man's adjective, "queer". When the man went to the rear to fill our tank, Barry remarked to me in a low voice:

"I'm going to pump this fellow for what he knows about the crowd at Hillhaven. He seems to have the nose of a fox and the eyes of an owl. I'll bet he hasn't missed much. He calls it a queer business, whereas the coroner called it

BY ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

A Mystery Novelette

81

a plain, and almost expected, suicide."

Thus, when the attendant came to the window of our sedan for his money, Starr questioned him.

"Why do you call it a queer business, Mr. ——?"

"Hulick's the name," said the attendant. "Guy Hulick."

In fact, the name was over the door of this wayside pop stand and filling station. It was now a little after 10 P.M; Starr and I had driven up just as Hulick had been on the point of closing for the night.

"Is there any doubt in your mind," inquired Starr keenly, "that Geoffry Judd committed suicide?"

"None at all," answered Hulick. Then, with a slight narrowing of his owlish left eye, he added, "But I think he was driven to it. Yeah, I know he's had lung trouble these last few years and has been despondent about it. All the same, I think he wouldn't have shot himself last night if a bird named Ten Eyck hadn't been a guest at the house."

Starr's interest quickened at mention of the Englishman, Arch Ten Eyck. It was a telephone call from Ten Eyck that had summoned us from the county seat.

"Why do you think Ten Eyck influenced the suicide?" insisted Starr.

"Because," stated Hulick, "old Judd tried suicide a month ago. Locked himself in his garage, started the motors of both cars, lay down on the floor and was nearly asphyxiated when Charley, the lame gardener, heard the motors running. Charley broke in and rescued Judd. Judd admitted trying suicide and said it was because of his health. Last night he tried it again, this time with a gun, while sitting in his study. Seven people in the house heard the shot and when they got to Judd he was dead."

"Well?" prompted Starr.

"Well, one of those seven people was Ten Eyck. This was Ten Eyck's second visit at Hillhaven. The first was a month ago, at the very time when Judd tried to gas himself. So I say it's queer for the suicide and the near suicide to happen, a month apart, in each case while Ten Eyck was a guest."

"Darn it, Ben," remarked Starr aside to me, "that *is* queer. And it's queerer yet in the light of Ten Eyck's calling me by phone."

"But, Barry," I objected, "if it's murder and Ten Eyck's connected with it, why should he phone to the district attorney?"

Ignoring me, Starr turned to Hulick.

"How do you know Ten Eyck was at Hillhaven a month ago?"

"Because he stopped here to inquire the road, just as you did," said Hulick. "Which means it was the first time he was ever there. The regular crowd that go there know the way, and generally make the turn here without stopping."

"Did you see any one drive by here last night, within the last few hours before Judd's death?"

"Yes, I saw Judd himself drive by at a little after ten, just as I was closing up. He must have arrived home at about ten-forty. It was a little after eleven,

they say, when he shot himself."

"Doesn't Judd use a chauffeur?" I asked.

"No," said Hulick. "Motoring was Judd's hobby and he always drove his own car. Mrs. Judd's the same way. They got three servants, but no chauffeur."

"Where had Judd been yesterday?"

"To New York. For years he's spent two days a week, Wednesday and Thursday, in New York. The rest of the time he spent at Hillhaven. His custom was to drive on Wednesday morning sixty miles to Montclair, park his car and take a local into New York. Thursday evening he always commuted back to Montclair, where he picked up his car and drove home."

We thus learned that Geoffry Judd's last trip to New York was quite regular. Starr thanked Hulick, tipped him a dollar and dismissed him.

We drove out from under the canopy of the filling station and turned on to a gravel road through the woods which followed the ridge toward Hillhaven.

On this final ten miles of our journey we passed but few houses. It was a sparsely settled district of the Kittatinny hills; the farms, I judged, were in the vales and hollows. The occupants of such few dwellings as were near the road had evidently retired at this hour, for the first lights we saw were those of Judd's country place, Hillhaven.

Here the road widened on a brow which dipped gently toward the Delaware River. Ten acres about the Judd house had been cleared and expertly landscaped, only a few of the original forest trees remaining on a lawn which was as smooth as a golfing green. The house was a broad, rambling bungalow of stone with porches on three sides and with French windows giving from the various rooms to these porches. From the fourth side "elled" a long, gabled annex which had been the private study of the millionaire Judd. It was in this study that, about twenty-four hours ago, he had either shot himself or been shot.

Against the outer end of this long study was built a two-car stone garage. It was here that, a month ago, Judd was known to have attempted suicide by asphyxiation.

Starr and I stopped directly in front of the house, got out, mounted the porch and rang the bell. Though the hall light was on, there was no sound of life within. It was reasonable to believe that, after the exhaustive inquiries of the day, all the inmates had gone to bed.

At our second ring we drew response from a tall, raw boned and ungainly maid, who opened the door and stood there fixing a stupid stare upon us.

"Will you inform Mrs. Judd," asked Starr, "that the assistant district attorney begs pardon for a late call, but would like to see her at once?"

He offered a card.

"The madam has retired," objected the maid in a tired, colorless voice.

"But I must nevertheless see her at once."

For a minute or so the maid, stolid and stubborn, held us at bay. At last she admitted us. We were shown into a book lined living room, and there we awaited the lady of the house.

SHE appeared in about ten minutes, and proved to be a slender, dark haired and dark eyed matron of less than forty years. At any rate she must have been more than twenty years younger than her late husband. We immediately saw that she was in a state of high nervous tension. She was tired. But, more noticeably, she was pale and drawn; she stood twisting her fingers. At the same time it seemed that her manner was one of alert defense.

We arose as she entered.

"Well?"

Her single word struck me as a challenge. She did not invite us to sit down, and she remained standing herself. It was a cold reception. Starr pretended not to notice it, saying:

"We've come, Mrs. Judd, not to annoy,

but to help. Won't you please tell me all you know about your husband's death?"

"A coroner, a sheriff and a constable were here for twelve hours," she replied slowly and with obvious caution. "They know all there is to know. Why don't you ask them?"

"I have," said Starr. "They tell me that an informal inquiry was conducted here this morning, which fully convinced them of suicide. That the pistol found at Mr. Judd's hand was one he had bought just before leaving New York yesterday. That its proper bullet had passed through his head and was embedded in the wall by the couch. That a precedent and every other circumstance indicated suicide. That the body was removed at noon today to Sussex, where I presume a more formal inquiry will be held. That interment is scheduled for day after tomorrow at the Judd family plot in Sussex. What I want to know is this: Did you see or hear your husband arrive home last night?"

With a sigh of resignation, Edith Judd waved us to seats. She herself sat down, answering:

"Geoffry returned from New York last night at about 10:40. I was half awake and I heard him drive into the garage. I looked out of my bedroom window—I had retired—and saw the lights come on in his study. I could not see into it, for the shades were drawn. He quite often stopped there for an hour or so before coming on to our suite. It was a few minutes later that I heard the shot."

"Just how many minutes later?" insisted Starr.

The question seemed to irritate her.

"I did not time the interval," she said. "I was only half awake, you know. It may have been anything from five to thirty minutes. Geoffry had evidently set his mind to the deed before leaving New York, because the coroner ascertained that he had bought the pistol there."

"You mean that Mr. Judd rode a train from New York to Montclair, then drove sixty miles by auto in order to commit suicide in his own study?" queried Starr in a tone of doubt.

"And why not?" she countered. "Wouldn't he naturally prefer to die under his own roof?"

"Was any one up when your husband reached home?"

"Every one had retired," she said. "That includes myself, four guests, a cook and a maid. All seven of us heard the shot. Two of us, myself and Mr. Drake, heard Geoffry drive into the garage. The other five heard only the shot."

"Who was the first to respond?" inquired Starr.

"Mr. Furman. When I reached the study door I found Mr. Furman there, in his bathrobe, trying to get in. But the door was locked. The others came quickly. Mr. Ten Eyck went out to the garage and tried to enter the study by that entrance, but the door there was locked also. So was every study window. The maid finally found her house keys and we entered."

"And found your husband dead," supplied Starr. "Did his body have the warmth of life, indicating that he had been dead only a few minutes?"

She winced, but answered in the affirmative.

"He left no note?"

"No," she told us, "but neither did he leave a note a month ago, when he admittedly tried suicide. Are you trying to make out a murder case, Mr. Sparr?"

"Starr," corrected my friend with a smile. "A murder case," he observed noncommittally, "seems absurd if Mr. Judd had locked himself in the study. Were the keys on the inside of the doors?"

"The inner door, yes. As for the door giving to the garage, its latch key was on Mr. Judd's key ring, which in turn was in his pocket."

"Who are the four guests?" inquired Starr.

"Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Furman, who

are old friends. Also Mr. Drake and Mr. Ten Eyck, an Englishman."

"They are still here?" Starr asked, almost casually.

"Yes. I asked Mr. Drake and the Furmans to stay, to help with arrangements for the funeral. I couldn't bear the thought of being alone."

"What about Ten Eyck?"

Obviously it had occurred to Starr as rather strange that the death of a host hadn't broken up what seemed to be a house party. Ordinarily guests, after such a tragedy, would express condolences to the widow and then tactfully depart.

"Mr. Ten Eyck is still here," said Mrs. Judd.

Her lips parted to say more, but she changed her mind. I thought that her armor of defense tightened visibly at the mention of Ten Eyck. She sat there, taut and pallid, staring past Starr rather than at him.

"You invited Ten Eyck to stay on for a day or two?" Starr prompted.

"No. Neither did I invite him to leave. He is not an old family friend like Mr. Drake and the Furmans. I have no idea how close he was to Geoffry. Geoffry, I think, had met him in New York."

"It is he," explained Starr, "whom I came to see. Will you be good enough to send for him?"

She was plainly startled.

"Why," she exclaimed, "do you want to see Mr. Ten Eyck?"

"Because," Starr told her, "he telephoned my office about three hours ago, saying he had reason to suspect that the case is not suicide, but murder."

"Oh!"

I saw Edith Judd's hands clench almost frenziedly, and for a moment I thought she would faint. Then, with an extreme effort, she pulled herself together.

"I'll send Mr. Ten Eyck to you," she said.

She arose and hurried, almost stumbling, from the room.

"WHAT do you think?" I asked Starr as we waited.

"I think the evidence of facts indicates suicide," he said, "while the evidence of the widow's face indicates murder."

"By the widow?"

"That I'm not prepared to believe—yet. Rather I would guess that she has some guilty knowledge. I know the Furmans, by the way, and I know Basil Drake. They're a crowd of about Edith Judd's age, I'd say, all of them nearly a generation younger than Judd. She ran with them, I understand, leaving old Judd pretty much to himself. Of Ten Eyck I never heard."

At that moment Ten Eyck appeared. He was a tall, blond Britisher, nearly bald, apple cheeked and with an extremely long neck. He wore a bathrobe and slippers and seemed just to have been aroused from sleep.

Starr introduced himself and came quickly to the point.

"Why do you suggest murder?"

"Beastly mess, what?" Ten Eyck grimaced. "I say, has Furman showed it to you yet?"

"Showed us what?"

"The clue. The dashed queer clue Furman and I popped on just after supper this evening, which caused me to call you on the phone."

"What clue?" inquired Starr impatiently.

I saw that he was appraising Ten Eyck shrewdly, and doubtingly, as though he did not altogether trust him.

"Come. We'll pop back there and have a look at it," offered Ten Eyck, and we followed him from the room.

He lead us rearward along a hall, past doors on either side, turning into an elbowing hallway which brought us to the door of Judd's study.

We entered, finding ourselves in the room where Judd had met his death.

It was about twenty feet wide and thirty long, lined with locked French windows and with a door at either end. The far door, we knew, gave into the

garage. The furnishings of the room would have done credit to the studio of a fine artist; handsome Oriental rugs on the floor and a number of costly pictures on the walls. At one side was the couch on which Judd had been found.

"Seven people heard the shot," stated Ten Eyck, "and we had all assembled by the time the maid found her keys. We all came in together. Judd lay there on his back, on the couch, dressed just as he had driven from New York. Mrs. Judd screamed, then fainted. Drake took care of her. Furman and I did not touch the body except to lift the legs to the couch. Then Furman phoned the nearest doctor, who happened to be a deputy coroner. He, not entirely sure it was suicide, brought along a pair of officers.

"Drake, Furman and I led them here to the study. They first looked for a suicide note, but found none. It was by then about 2 A.M. The doctor peeled off Judd's coat for two reasons: First, to see if there was any wound or sign of violence other than the bullet wound in the head; second, to get a thermometer under the armpit for temperature—"

"That," interrupted Starr, "was so he could calculate the interval since death. What did he find?"

"He said Judd had been dead about two hours and forty-five minutes, which would put it around 11:15. That checked with the time we all heard the shot. The bullet had been fired almost at contact, had passed through the head and into the wall by the couch. It was probed and matched the pistol, which we later learned had been bought by Judd that afternoon in New York. To cut it short, the officials spent the rest of the night and all morning asking questions, and by noon certified it as suicide. They took the body to town, Drake going with them. Drake returned in time for supper. Just after supper, Furman and I popped in here and ran into the clue."

"What?" prodded Starr.

"Judd's coat. You see, this yokel doctor, after searching the pockets for a suicide note, had peeled it off and tossed it aside. There it lies. There's been no reason to touch it since."

Ten Eyck pointed to a blue serge coat which hung carelessly over the end of the couch, the lining side exposed.

"Let's get this straight," said Starr. I could see that he was alert for a trick and was watching Ten Eyck like a hawk. "The inquiry lasted from two o'clock last night until noon today, when the body was taken away. All afternoon, then, this room was empty of everything pertinent except Judd's coat, which had been tossed aside and forgotten."

"Right6," agreed Ten Eyck.

His Adam's apple seemed to leap upward in his long lean throat as he spoke. Also, in his speech was a tone of flippancy which rubbed me the wrong way.

"Just after supper tonight," continued Ten Eyck, "Furman and I staggered in here and—"

"Why," interrupted Starr severely, "did you and Furman stagger, as you say, in here after supper?"

"Mrs. Judd sent us. During the inquiry she'd left her cigaret case here, and she wanted it. She couldn't bear to come in here herself, so she sent Furman. I was discussing motorboats with Furman at the moment, so I came along with him. We found the cigaret case. Then we noticed the coat. It looked a bit untidy hanging there that way, and might have given Mrs. Judd a jolt if she came in, which she's bound to do sooner or later. So Furman started to put it over a hanger in the closet. But he didn't. What he saw caused us to leave the coat just as we found it and phone the district attorney. It gave me a bit of a start, I'll admit. Furman and I agreed not to alarm the household, so we've said nothing about it except to you."

Starr did not immediately pick up the coat. Keeping his keen eyes steadily upon the Englishman, he asked—

"And what startling clue did you find on the coat whose pockets, I understand,

had already been searched by the coroner?"

"Something that doesn't wash down any too dashed well with a suicide theory," answered Ten Eyck, with a flush on the knotty red apples of his cheeks. "Does the number 81 mean anything to you, Mr. Starr?" he asked in a tone of anxiety.

Naturally Starr was astonished. Staring hard at Ten Eyck, he answered:

"It means the square of nine, or nineteen less than a hundred. It might mean a street address, or the year of a man's birth. What about it?"

Ten Eyck took up the coat, spread it and held it so that its back faced squarely toward us.

What I saw shocked me. In figures a foot high and sketched with a neat precision of draftsmanship was a number. The number seemed to have been made with a brush about half an inch wide, dipped in brown paint. The figures reached from a few inches below the collar almost to the skirt of the coat.

Starr immediately sprang to examine the couch on which Judd had lain. Having been found lying there face up, those who discovered him would not have been able to see any marks on the back of his coat. But if the paint were fairly fresh, it might have left a daub or two on the couch.

Starr, with a microscope, and bringing a bright light close, found a few faint traces of brown. But only where the dead man's weight had made the firmest contact between coat and couch. The stains were barely discernible and were not in continuous lines. The paint, then, must have been nearly dry before Judd had fallen dead on the couch.

I could see that Starr was entirely mystified as he turned toward Ten Eyck. Possibly he recalled the first word with which Ten Eyck had addressed us, "Beastly mess!" Possibly he recalled the phrase applied by that gossipy filling station man, Guy Hulick. "A queer business!"

Indeed it was more than queer that a man should shoot himself, or be shot, with 81 painted boldly on his back.

STARR took the coat and hung it in a closet.

"Ten Eyck," he said, "you were here, were you not, a month ago when Judd tried gassing himself in the garage?"

"Righto," agreed Ten Eyck cheerfully.

"That was the first time you had ever been here?"

"Right."

"And this is your second visit?"

"Right again, old chap."

A touch of insolence was creeping into the man's voice.

"Your visits seem to have a fatal effect," observed Starr dryly.

For the first time Ten Eyck displayed temper.

"See here, don't be an ass. If I were mixed up in the bally mess, why should I ring up the district attorney?"

"You didn't," Starr reminded him, "until after a man named Furman became aware of the number on the coat. Then you knew Furman would tell about it, whether you did or not."

"Well," said Ten Eyck defensively, "as for my being here a month ago, I recall that the chap Drake was here too. And he's here now."

"That so?" countered Starr. "But Drake, I understand, is an old friend of the family, and has been here a score of times. Thus the coincidence in his case is not so striking. Ten Eyck, just what was your connection with Judd?"

The answer came so quickly that I thought Ten Eyck might have rehearsed it.

"Mr. Judd was my friend," he said. "I met him on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange."

"Any business dealings with him?"

"None at all."

"Your two visits here were entirely social?"

"Quite."

Starr turned abruptly and walked to

the far exit of the study. He opened it and stepped directly into a garage which housed a sedan and a roadster. Ten Eyck and I followed him. Starr turned on the garage light and examined both cars. He gave particular attention to the driver's seat of the sedan, in which Judd had arrived twenty-five hours ago from New York. He was looking for some faint stain of brown paint, to establish whether or not the 81 had been on the coat prior to Judd's arrival.

He found no such trace.

Starr then went to the door of the study and examined the lock.

"It's a common night latch," he pointed out. "The kind that locks when you close the door. Therefore the fact that Judd was found locked in the study means nothing at all. Any one of the household could have waited for Judd here in the garage. He or she could have gone into the study with Judd, could have murdered him with Judd's own pistol with the idea that suicide would be assumed because Judd tried it a month ago. He or she could have stepped back into the garage, pulling the door to and automatically locking it. He or she could then have circled the house, entering his or her French window from the porch, and emerged into the hall to join the group aroused by the shot."

A fair theory, I admitted, except for the 81 painted on Judd's back. But in the presence of Ten Eyck I thought it best not to discuss that clue with Starr.

We returned through the study to the hallway and went forward to the living room. There we found two men, garbed in bathrobes and slippers, with whom both Starr and I had a nodding acquaintance. One was Andrew Furman and the other was Basil Drake.

Furman was short, stocky, with a lump of forehead showing above bushy eyebrows. I had heard of him as a shoestring speculator in real estate. His hair was rumpled now, from sleeping, though there was at all times a shaggy, bear-like look about him. He was not a man of polished manners, as was Basil Drake.

Drake was tall, clean cut, and was generally considered handsome. He called himself a lawyer, though I knew he was more successful as a dinner guest. He was invited about quite a bit, and possessed the gift of pleasing women. He was of a decadent family, his own fortune long ago dissipated.

Starr stated tersely that he had found 81 painted on Judd's coat. Furman knew about it, but apparently Drake did not. At any rate, he seemed startled.

"But why should Judd," he gasped "paint a number on his own coat?"

"I'll wager he didn't," returned Starr. "Whoever painted the number, I feel sure, is alive and a murderer."

There was an interval of acute tension, broken by the mantel clock as it struck midnight. Then the tall and ungainly maid appeared at the door, saying—

"The madam asked me to fix a room for you, Mr. Starr, in case you—"

"Excellent," accepted Starr briskly. "Yes, Mr. Volney and I'll be very glad to stay all night. Come, Ben. And good night, gentlemen."

We left Furman, Drake and Ten Eyck standing there and were shown to a room.

"Barry," I said when we were alone, "what about this ghoulish 81? It doesn't fit suicide; but neither does it fit murder."

"Unless," suggested Starr, "the murderer left it as a warning."

"A warning?"

"Yes. 81 means nothing to us, yet it might well recite a complete story to some one else. It might convey the motive of the murder to that some one and warn him or her to keep silent. It's rather interesting to note that either Ten Eyck or Furman took pains, conceivably, to uncover the clue. If planted as a warning, it was no good until exposed. Those country officials happened to overlook it. It would have still been undiscovered if Furman and Ten Eyck hadn't gone in there this evening and

picked up the coat."

"You mean that either Ten Eyck or Furman was in a sweat to make the warning become effective?"

"I mean that that's barely possible, and must be considered. I'm convinced that Mrs. Judd knows more than she tells, which suggests that she's the one being warned. On the other hand, she might be the warner. Here's still another angle. Maybe the murderer did not paint the 81 on Judd's coat. Maybe it wasn't there at all when he died. Maybe the warning was not *from* the murderer, but *to* the murderer."

That was away beyond my depth, and I said so.

"Suppose," suggested Starr, "that some one witnessed the crime and knows the motive and details. For example, suppose that the murderer shot Judd in order to steal 81 thousand dollars from him, or 81 gems, or a document dated 1881. A witness might know this, and yet not be ready to reveal his or her identity to the murderer. Such a witness might have put an 81 on the discarded coat to frighten the murderer, to profit, or to correct the suicide theory and lead to the murderer's conviction without coming forward himself, or herself. I'll concede that sounds involved but—" Starr shrugged— "what have you? The 81 stares us in the face and we've got to work on it."

"My advice," I said, "would be to work on Ten Eyck."

"Yes, Ten Eyck can hardly be purely an innocent onlooker to the mystery. By all rights he should have pulled out immediately after the inquiry, since he's not an old friend licensed to stick around a house of mourning. Yet here we find him, standing pat."

It was a sinister situation. Plain murder was bad enough, but murder garnished by that writing on the victim's back made it a thing to chill one's blood. I could not for a moment concede the theory just suggested by Starr, that the 81 was a warning before or after the crime, a warning from or to the murderer. To me the number meant some weird gesture of triumph. That, too, was well nigh incredible, when I considered the characters of the survivors at Hillhaven. Had anything less serious than death been involved I would have called the 81 a huge and ghoulish joke.

I SLEPT but little until just before dawn. When I awoke I saw that Starr was up and had finished shaving. He said he was going down to have a look at the study by daylight.

When I reached the study he had finished his inspection there and was puttering about the garage. Of the two cars, the sedan was the vehicle used by Judd. The roadster was Mrs. Judd's. Starr examined the roadster with care, inside and out.

"It's dusty," he said, "and I don't think it's been driven since the last rain."

He then circled the sedan and paused to peer carefully at the spare tire.

"Do you notice anything about that tire?" he asked.

"Nothing, except that it's caked with brown mud," I answered.

We walked out into the sunlight and strolled to the front of the house. There stood Starr's own car, just as we had left it. Our own tires were also caked with brown mud.

"Do you remember where we picked that mud up, Ben?"

I wasn't sure, but it seemed to me we had passed a place about halfway from the county seat where a stretch of new construction had left the highway unsurfaced.

"See," I said, "we even splashed a spot of mud on our spare."

Barry looked closely at a brown spot on our own spare tire. Suddenly he became tense and exclaimed:

"It's not mud, but paint. Brown paint! The same shade as the number 81 found on Judd's back. And look! What's that?"

His eye had been caught by an ob-

ject lying on the lawn about four paces to the rear of our car. When we retrieved it, it proved to be a paint brush about half an inch wide. The color of the dry paint which stained the brush was brown.

"On a bet," cried Starr, "here is the brush which painted the 81 on Judd. The figures themselves, you'll recall, are a foot high. But each line is only half an inch wide. Just right for this brush. What do you make of it?"

It floored me. I offered a half hearted hazard that the murderer had emerged from the house during the night to paint a warning on our car, possibly an 81. Or possibly he thought that a single stroke of brown would suffice. Then he threw the brush away.

"Weak," objected Starr. "He threw the brush away, all right. But I don't believe our car was deliberately daubed. If the painter still had the brush he or she would naturally want to get rid of it, especially after the case was tightened by the arrival of a district attorney. Possibly the painter came out on the porch during the night, in pajamas, and threw the brush as far as it could be thrown. It may have struck the rear of our car, leaving a daub, then caromed to the lawn. Even that doesn't wash down any too well, but again I ask, what have you? Hello, who's that?"

We saw a square headed, heavy set man, clad in overalls, emerge from a small cottage at the south edge of the lawn. He was walking, with a distinct limp, toward the garage.

"That should be Charley, the gardener," I said. This, when we accosted him, proved to be true.

He was a stolid fellow, not ill tempered and yet not communicative. His features, to me, did not convey a great deal of intelligence. From his mouth to his right ear was an old, deep scar. Later he told me that he had cut himself with a lawn sickle the first year of his employ at Hillhaven.

Starr displayed the brush.

"Charley, did you ever see that before?" he asked sternly.

Charley blinked stupidly at the brush. He said he didn't know whether it belonged there or not. It might, for there was a good deal of paint, all colors, and many odd brushes in the tool house. Charley said he hadn't done any painting for some months and did not have an exact inventory of the paint and the brushes.

That was all we could get out of Charley.

Our next jolt came at breakfast. When we assembled there, we were met by Mrs. Judd, Ten Eyck and the Furmans. Basil Drake did not appear.

The maid was sent to knock on his door. She reported no response. Charley was sent for. Charley limped in and reported that of three automobiles driven to Hillhaven by Drake, Ten Eyck and the Furmans, and which had been parked under an outshed, Drake's blue coupé was missing.

It became apparent that some time between midnight and dawn Basil Drake, without even saying goodby to his hostess, had driven away from Hillhaven.

DRAKE, we learned, hailed from Albany. Barry Starr quickly got busy on the telephone. He called a New York detective agency which had often served his office and instructed:

"Check up on Basil Drake at Albany. His car's a blue Chevvy coupé; get the number and trace him. Have another man check up on the activities of Geoffry Judd Wednesday and Thursday in New York, and see if he drew any large sum of money from the banks. Hardly any doubt now but that Judd was murdered shortly after his return to Hillhaven. Keep me posted by phone."

Starr then rang up the county sheriff. I heard him say:

"The Hillhaven case smells like murder. Get in touch with the coroner and tell him to hold everything. In the meantime send me out a couple of husky deputies. One guest has already given

me the slip, and I want the rest of them watched closely."

Starr then herded us all into the living room. We sat down. A solemn group we were, as we formed an arc facing Starr. First there was Edith Judd. Last night she had seemed nervously on the defensive, but this morning she seemed ready to wilt from fright. Her eyes gave evidence that she had wept a great many tears during the night. She seemed so slight, so utterly frail this morning, that she instantly won my sympathy. I came to a firm conviction that she herself had not murdered Judd.

At her side sat Mrs. Furman, a woman of her own age, stout, robust, masculine. She sat there with a militant pursing of her lips, eyeing Starr with a look of cool challenge, and all the while she kept an arm around Mrs. Judd. Occasionally she patted Mrs. Judd's hand and whispered a word of comfort.

Next sat her stocky, shaggy husband, Andrew Furman, and then the lank Britisher, Ten Eyck. Then came the three servants: Cora, ungainly and ox-eyed maid; Charley, lame and scar-cheeked gardener; and a plump, matronly Irish cook, Maggie Ryan.

"Can any one here," began Starr, "offer a suggestion as to why 81 was painted on Mr. Judd's coat?"

No one answered.

"Was Mr. Judd's pocket money intact?" next inquired Starr.

"Quite," spoke up Ten Eyck. "There was a wallet in his pocket containing something like sixty dollars."

Starr turned to Furman.

"When did you arrive here, Mr. Furman?"

"My wife and I arrived Monday," said Furman.

"And you, Ten Eyck?"

"Tuesday."

"What about Drake?"

"Drake got here at noon Wednesday," offered Furman, "about two hours after Judd left for New York."

"Then Drake did not see Judd."

"Not unless they passed each other on the road."

Starr turned to Edith Judd.

"Did your husband leave a will?"

"If so, I never heard of one," the widow answered.

Starr took the name of Judd's New York attorneys and sent me to telephone them. I did so, and was told that they had never drawn a will at the direction of Geoffry Judd.

"However," the senior partner added, "that does not prove he did not make a will. He might have made a holograph will himself, or he might have consulted some other attorneys."

I returned to the living room with this report, just in time to hear testimony which was being offered by the Irish cook, Ryan.

"—and they came down late for breakfast, Thursday morning, sir," she was saying, "an hour after the others had finished."

There was a flush on Furman's cheek and a mounting indignation on his wife's; so I knew they were concerned in the testimony.

"And as you served these late breakfasters," Starr prompted, "you heard them discussing Mr. Judd?"

"I can't say who they were discussing, sir, but Mrs. Furman said, 'If thot auld tightwad br-reaks his promise, he ought to be shot. I could sheerfully do it meself.' "

Mrs. Furman blazed out angrily:

"I said no such thing. I only said—" Catching a look from her husband, she bit her lip and lapsed into sullen silence.

"Go ahead, Maggie," Starr urged the cook. "Did you hear Mr. Furman's reply?"

"Yes, sir. Just as I came in with the aigs I heard Mr. Furman say, 'But I think he'll keep his promise, dear. I think he's diggin' up the money today in New Yor-rk. If he isn't, then, of course, it means we'r-re sunk.' "

Starr turned sternly to Furman.

"So Judd had promised you some money, had he, which you expected him to bring back Thursday night? If he

didn't, you were sunk. If he didn't, he ought to be shot and your wife could cheerfully do the shooting! Inasmuch as he was shot within an hour after reaching home, that's a pretty bald situation."

It was a tight corner for the Furmans, yet Furman kept a fairly convincing front as he answered Starr:

"The cook's making a mountain out of a molehill. If my wife used a phrase like that, it was purely rhetorical. The truth is this: Ninety days ago I had a chance to make a bargain buy on Long Island beach acreage worth over a million. The option itself cost fifteen thousand, which is every cent I had. A first payment would have to be made in ninety days, a term which expired yesterday. So I needed help to swing the deal; I got it, or a promise of it, from Judd. I purchased the option with the last cent of my own money. Last Monday being only four days before the deadline, I came here to remind Judd of his promise.

"He evaded me. He told me he had graver things on his mind and couldn't be bothered with my deal. I pleaded with him all of Monday and Tuesday, and when he went to town Wednesday I still hoped that it was to arrange the due payment, which was seventy thousand dollars."

"And you were bitterly disappointed when he didn't," suggested Starr. "Furman, weren't you waiting up for him Thursday night? Didn't you meet him at the garage, follow him into the study and there quarrel with him? Didn't he draw a pistol in his own defense, and didn't you snatch it from his hand?"

"I did none of those things," Furman denied stoutly. "I was asleep when he arrived home and I was awakened by the shot."

"The option expired yesterday, did it?"

"Yes—and with it the Furman bankroll," admitted Furman bitterly.

At that moment we heard the telephone ring at the rear end of the hall. Starr, telling us to wait, went to answer.

HE WAS gone for fully ten minutes. When he returned, his expression was grimmer than it had been at any time since our arrival at Hillhaven.

"The last doubt of murder," he told us, "is rubbed out. Why? Because a New York agency has ascertained for me how Mr. Judd spent his time there Thursday. His bank says that he drew out no money, but that he was admitted to his safety deposit box. Evidently Mr. Judd took from this box a packet of bonds. He went directly to various brokers and sold these bonds; sold some here, some there, until he had disposed of enough to raise one hundred thousand dollars in cash."

"You mean ready money—currency?" I exclaimed.

"I mean just that. Whenever he received a check for a batch of bonds, he stepped in at the nearest bank and cashed the check. No single transaction was big enough to attract attention in a place like New York. But a checkup of his entire day shows that he raised sums which total one hundred thousand and he was seen to put each roll of bills, as he received it, in a brown briefcase. Since that briefcase is missing, it means that he was robbed by his murderer."

The information seemed to stun every one in the room. I was thinking of Basil Drake, who had fled in the night from Hillhaven. What the others were thinking of I don't know, unless it was the number 81 painted on Judd's coat.

"In this new light," Starr was saying, "I can only insist that all of you stay close at hand today while we seek further evidence. Any one attempting to imitate Basil Drake and depart will be suspected."

With that Starr left the room and the house. I followed him to the front lawn and we walked toward a little latticed, vine clad Summer-house which decorated the extreme north edge of the grounds.

It was a nice retreat for intimate discussion. Seated with our pipes well

stoked, Starr said:

"Ben, we can hardly connect the hundred thousand dollars with Furman's option. Furman only required seventy thousand, and Judd would have brought him a certified check."

"Cash in a briefcase," I agreed, "smells like blackmail."

"Exactly. Especially since Judd raised the money inconspicuously, cashing a few bonds at one broker's, a few at another's. He was bringing the money here to buy some one's silence. Whose? Most likely Ten Eyck's."

"Why Ten Eyck?"

"Because Ten Eyck can't show us any credentials. He can't explain why he's at Hillhaven, except to say vaguely that he's a friend who met Judd on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Edith Judd declines to vouch for him. She does vouch for Drake and the Furmans. I think Ten Eyck was an unwelcome guest here a month ago, and I think he still is."

"Furman tells a pretty straight story," I said. "We can leave him out of it, can't we?"

"Not at all. Furman says Judd turned cold about the option, saying that graver things were on his mind. Suppose the grave matter which engrossed Judd was the necessity of paying blackmail to Ten Eyck. He went to New York for Ten Eyck's money, returning with it at eleven Thursday night and was met at the garage, we'll say, by the eager Furman. Furman followed him into the study, becoming bitterly disappointed when Judd did not produce a certified check for seventy thousand. How much more would he have been embittered, then, if in some way he discovered that Judd had a hundred thousand in cash right there in his hands!

"Furman would surely have demanded seventy thousand of it as his own right, a due payment to fulfil Judd's promise and to salvage his own investment. Denied it, he might have tried taking it by force, winding up by shooting Judd. The gun, I think, was bought by Judd in New York to protect his own journey home—a natural precaution against hijackers along the road; he hardly thought he'd need it under his own roof."

"A fairly tight case," I admitted.

"But hardly as tight as the one against Ten Eyck," countered Starr. "Suppose it was Ten Eyck who waited up for Judd? In the study, let us say that Judd proffered the money, but in turn insisted upon some security that the extortion would not be repeated; such as an old letter or incriminating document. If Ten Eyck declined to do this, Judd would have held tight to the money. The result—a struggle, Ten Eyck leaving Judd dead and escaping with the briefcase of bills."

"But," I said, "the only one who fled is Basil Drake, the unsuccessful lawyer and highly successful dinner guest. As you know, he's a sort of professional society sponger who gets invited around a great deal and knows everything. He, rather than Ten Eyck, may have been the blackmailer."

"That's right," agreed Starr. "Let's get back to the house in case they phone in word about him."

As we crossed the lawn I reminded Starr that all our theories entirely left out the 81 found on Judd's coat.

"And say, Barry, it's impossible that the 81 was painted on the coat after it had been tossed aside by the coroner. Because you found faint traces of brown on the couch, where Judd was lying when found."

"Not impossible," he said, "because the painter might have deliberately touched the brush to the couch to create the illusion that the number was there while Judd wore the coat. I can't see why he or she should desire that illusion, but there's a good many things I can't see. Perhaps there may be, after all, some very simple explanation of the 81."

We reached the house, and Starr told me to wait on the porch for the two deputies he had summoned.

"Tell them everything," he said. "I'm going to rummage around the house for

evidence of a will. I might turn up a holograph will tucked away somewhere, or I might turn up a personal notebook with some reference to a will."

"You think a will is important?"

"Young man," returned Starr in a tone of mock rebuke, "the most important thing about any millionaire is his will. Unless it's the fact that he's made no will. When a poor young man is murdered they say, 'Find the woman.' But when a rich old man is murdered they say, 'Find the will.' "

Starr left me and entered the house.

I remained on the porch. The Furmans came out, passed me without speaking and crossed the lawn to the Summer-house. Evidently they wanted a private retreat where they could talk, since talking before a servant had put them in something of a hole. It occurred to me, too, that the encircling forest came very close to the rear of the Summer-house; in fact, there was thick underbrush directly against it. It would, therefore, provide an excellent avenue of escape. The Furmans could, if they wished, pass on into the woods without my seeing them. But I reflected that they would have to go afoot, and could be easily caught.

In a moment a Ford drew up bearing the two deputy sheriffs sent for by Starr. I greeted them; they were a husky pair of hillbred lads who told me to call them Bill and George.

We sat down and I told them everything. As I finished we heard the telephone ringing within. Then we heard Starr's voice, answering the call.

When Starr joined us he said that the call had been a negative report on Drake.

"Drake has not reached his home in Albany," he said, "nor has he been seen on the road there. No word of him at all."

"Drake's our man, all right," spoke up the senior deputy, George. "Looks to me like a cinch case. We know some one here shot Judd and took a bag o' money. Every one stands pat but Drake, who beats it. What more do you want?"

"I want," answered Starr with a weary smile, "an explanation of the number 81."

THE Furmans emerged from the Summer-house and strolled about the lawn. Starr assigned Bill to watch them. He told George to watch Ten Eyck and the servants. He told me to keep an eye on the widow, in case she left the house.

"But give them a free rein," he said. "All you really need to watch are the automobiles, since any flight on foot would be futile. As for me, I'm going to keep digging through Judd's papers."

He went in. Shortly after that the maid announced lunch. Bill and I ate while George remained on the porch. Neither Mrs. Judd nor the Furmans ate with us. Ten Eyck later ate with Starr. If Ten Eyck were nervous, we didn't notice it. Nor was he resentful; he came out and chatted affably with the deputies, discussing the case with them in minute detail.

George said:

"It's all in the bag, if you ask me. Can't be anybody but Drake who popped Judd and lammed with a hundred grand."

Ten Eyck answered with a shrug:

"But, dash it all, Drake didn't strike me as that sort of bounder. I sized him as top hole, if you know what I mean."

The afternoon dragged tediously. Not a thing happened. In fact the life of the estate seemed to resolve into a humdrum of normal routine. Charley limped about the lawn, puttering with his bushes. The guests took turns at strolling about. Furman seated himself on the porch with a magazine, and toward five o'clock Mrs. Furman played a game of tennis with Ten Eyck. Mrs. Judd remained in her room.

It was just after five that Barry Starr came out and told me he had found evidence of a will. In his hand he held a

small memorandum book in which Judd had jotted down the numbers of his insurance policies, the due dates of important notes and like data.

"Found it at the back of a desk drawer in the study," said Starr jubilantly. "One of the memos reads, 'See Paddington about will.' That notation is in pencil, in Judd's writing, and by its sequence with other memos seems to have been jotted down about a year ago."

"Who," I asked, "is Paddington?"

"Mrs. Judd tells me that Paddington's an old fogy of a country lawyer at Lewiston—about twenty miles from here—an old crony of Judd's and just the attorney Judd would have consulted about such a simple, and yet confidential, matter a will. I telephoned Paddington's house, just now, but he's out. His wife says he's hunting quail. I told her that Judd's case looks like murder and I'm looking for a clue in the will."

Again I protested that Starr was overestimating the importance of a will.

"No," he argued. "The will must tell us who benefits by Judd's death. The widow claims she didn't know a will existed, but perhaps she did know. My own hunch is that the will may tip off the meaning of that number 81."

"Any word on Drake?"

"None. But I turned up something new on Ten Eyck."

"What?"

"I've had a long chat with the cook, Maggie Ryan, who seems to be the one member of the household definitely above suspicion. I asked her if any one left the premises yesterday afternoon, other than Drake, who we know accompanied the officials to Sussex with the body."

"Why did you ask that?"

"Because of the briefcase full of money," explained Starr. "According to our theory, a murderer took that briefcase. He or she had no time to put it in a permanent cache. The murderer had to circle the house in a hurry, enter his or her room by a French window and emerge immediately to join the hue and cry in the corridors. Soon the doctor and officials arrived and twelve hours were consumed in inquiries. All that while the murderer must have had the briefcase in a temporary cache."

"What did Maggie say?"

"She said that about an hour after the officials left, Ten Eyck took his car and followed them. But he returned in about an hour. Maggie saw him leave; she did not see the briefcase, but it might have been concealed under his coat."

I agreed that that would have been Ten Eyck's first opportunity to cache the loot at a distance from Hillhaven.

Just then Ten Eyck and Mrs. Furman finished their tennis and came to the house. Mrs. Furman went by us with her chin in the air, without speaking. But Ten Eyck joined us chattily.

"What ho? Any good word?"

"No good word," answered Starr sternly. "The bad word is that you drove away from here at one o'clock yesterday and were gone nearly an hour. Where did you go?"

Ten Eyck stared at Starr for a moment, then broke into loud laughter.

"I see your plot, old chap," he cried, clapping Starr heartily on the shoulder. "You think I crept away to bury the money in the woods—what? But, dash it all, I didn't."

"Where did you go?"

"Where should I go?" countered Ten Eyck. "I'm an Englishman; a British colonial to be exact, and spent fifteen years of my life running a coffee plantation in Ceylon. Which means I like my whisky strong and straight. Now, old chap, you've been sleuthing about all day and have doubtless discovered that Judd was a prohibitionist. Didn't keep a drop of liquor in the house."

"And so you went for a drink?" prompted Starr skeptically.

"What else? After a spot of excitement like that, and after being held on the carpet twelve hours by that yokel coroner, I jolly well wanted a drink—and I got one."

"Where?"

"At that pop stand and filling station ten miles up the ridge, run by a chap named Hulick. Drake tipped me. He told me all's not pop that's red, and that Hulick does a bit of bootlegging on the side."

Again Ten Eyck clapped Starr heartily on the shoulder, then turned and entered the house.

"I'm going to Lewiston to look up Judd's will," Starr told me. "On the way, I'll stop at Hulick's and check up on the time Ten Eyck got there for a drink. And the length of his stay. Hulick, though, may be cagey, for fear of being prosecuted as a bootlegger. I've no doubt Ten Eyck actually stopped there for a drink. He'd do that in order to be able later to explain why he left Hillhaven. All the same, he had ten lonely miles of woods, going and coming, in which to hide the money."

"Did you get that about Ten Eyck's spending fifteen years in Ceylon?"

Starr smiled deprecatingly.

"You're thinking, Ben, that Ceylon spells mystery and so does our cryptogram, 81. But that's rank superstition. I'd a good deal rather look for 81 in a will than in Ceylon."

AT THAT moment a car came out of the woods, circled the drive and stopped in front of the house. It was a blue coupé, and to our amazement the missing suspect, Basil Drake, alighted.

Drake—dressed like a fashion plate, as always, although I noted that his eyes showed lack of sleep—mounted the porch. He shook hands with us and asked Starr if there'd been any developments during the day. His expression gave no hint of guile and I must admit that his sudden return quite disarmed us.

"The principal development," Starr told him, "was that you pulled out of here between midnight and dawn."

"It was just at dawn, to be exact," said Drake, staring at us with a look of complete innocence. Then his handsome face creased into a smile of embarrassment. "Oh, I see! You thought I was running away! Absurd of you to think that, Starr."

"Possibly," answered Starr. "But where did you go?"

"I went to Trenton, had a talk with a banker friend of mine there, then went to a hotel for a nap and a bath, then came directly back to Hillhaven."

"Why?"

Drake reeled off an explanation of baffling simplicity. He said that a month ago here at Hillhaven he had played a game of contract bridge with the Judds and Ten Eyck. Ten Eyck lost; Drake won and took Ten Eyck's check on a bank of Trenton, New Jersey. Weeks later the check was returned to Drake marked "insufficient funds". This week Drake returned to Hillhaven and again met Ten Eyck. Out of courtesy to the hosts, Drake did not quarrel with Ten Eyck about the check.

Then came what seemed to be the suicide of Judd. Drake stood the inquiry and helped escort the body to town. He returned to comfort and assist the widow as an old friend. Then at midnight we turned up with suspicions of murder and exposed a mysterious 81. Drake went to bed, but was uneasy. If any one murdered Judd, thought Drake, it would be Ten Eyck. Yet it would be indelicate for Drake to accuse a fellow guest. So he resolved to inquire privately about Ten Eyck. Where? The only lead was a Trenton check. Drake had a banker friend at Trenton and from him could make confidential inquiry about Ten Eyck. And the quicker the better.

Thus, at dawn, Drake arose and drove quietly away. At Trenton he learned that Ten Eyck had arrived there six weeks ago and deposited a check on a British bank of Colombo, Ceylon. The account was soon exhausted and would have been overdrawn had Drake's own check been honored.

Having given us this information, Basil Drake entered the house.

"Do you believe his story?" I asked Starr.

"As far as it goes, yes," he said. "No doubt we will find that Drake actually made inquiries at Trenton about Ten Eyck. The question is, did he do so seriously? Or merely to provide himself with an alibi while he cached one hundred thousand dollars?"

With the mystery thus scrambled, Starr left me. He went to our car and drove off to look up Paddington and the will.

It was then just six o'clock. The maid appeared and announced that a buffet supper had been placed on the sideboard. Singly and in pairs the household reported for sandwiches and coffee.

In the gloom of dusk, Bill, George and I held a conference on the front porch. We discussed the return of Drake.

"He'll still bear watching," said George. "But the main thing to watch is the cars. I'm going to drive Drake's coupé under the shed and sit up in it all night. I'll park it right between the Furman's car and Ten Eyck's, and watch all three of them."

Bill said he'd spend the night in the garage, keeping watch over the two Judd autos. We were all convinced that there could be no successful flight without motor transportation.

The deputies went to their posts while I remained on the porch.

AS THE dusk deepened, Ten Eyck emerged from the house. He borrowed a cigaret and then went for a stroll about the spacious lawn.

I kept a sharp eye on him, though in the gloom he was hardly more than a silhouette. After a turn or two about the gardens, he entered the latticed Summer-house at the edge of the wood.

I could not see the interior of this vine clad shelter, and thus I realized that Ten Eyck could easily pass out at the far side of it and walk away, unseen, into the forest. What if he did? He could hardly go far afoot and would only enmesh himself in suspicions. I decided to give him plenty of rope.

Suddenly the moon peeped above the trees and gave a mellow illumination to the lawn. I looked at my watch. It was eight o'clock.

And then Edith Judd came out on the porch. It was the first time I had seen her since breakfast. She was without a hat, wore a clinging black dress, and a shawl was over her shoulders.

"Where is Mr. Starr?" she asked me.

"He went to see Paddington about your husband's will."

"Do I understand I'm a prisoner in my own house?" she inquired bitterly.

"By no means," I assured her. "Yet I imagine a formal inquest will be held tomorrow, either here or at Sussex, and all of us will be required to testify. Did you wish to go to town now, Mrs. Judd?"

"Tomorrow will do," she answered with a shrug, and passed on to the lawn.

I watched her figure, in the pale moonlight, as she strolled aimlessly about. I saw her pick a rose, carry it a little way, switching it nervously; finally she threw it away. Her nervous strain was pitifully obvious. What did she know?

And then I saw that she was edging a little closer to the Summer-house. Did she know that Ten Eyck was there? Had they arranged a tryst?

In a moment she entered the Summer-house, darting in swiftly. Probably she thought I could not see her from the porch.

No doubt she was conferring with the Englishman. Was it my duty to spy on them? While I was debating this, the woman emerged. She had been in there no more than five minutes.

She came directly to the house. When she reached the porch she was crying. I arose with a discreet inquiry, but she offered no explanation. Just then Mrs. Furman came out. She brushed me aside and put an arm around Mrs. Judd, asking—

"What's the matter, Edith?"

The widow's sobbing now arose to the

pitch of hysteria. Mrs. Furman led her to a settee at the far end of the porch, where they sat down. She soothed Mrs. Judd as a mother might soothe a child.

There they remained for about twenty minutes. I was watching them and thus I did not, in that interval, effectively watch the lawn. Furman I had not seen for hours. Neither had I seen, since supper, any of the servants. Nor had I seen Basil Drake since he had entered the house, presumably going to his room. Certainly I was unaware if any dim shadow crossed the lawn during the twenty minutes that Mrs. Furman sat on the porch settee, comforting Edith Judd.

Finally Mrs. Judd got up and went into the house. Mrs. Furman remained on the settee; I saw her light a cigaret.

My watch informed me that it was 8:35. I recalled Ten Eyck. Was he still in the Summer-house? He might be, or he might have emerged during my inattention, circled the house, entered at the rear and gone to his room. Or for the last half hour he might have been in flight through the woods.

Certainly it was time for a check on him.

So I went to the garage and summoned Bill.

"Ten Eyck went to the Summer-house at eight," I told him, "and I'm wondering if he's still there."

We crossed the lawn to the Summer-house. It was dark within, and we saw nothing until Bill switched his flash over the interior.

Then Bill gave a yell which must have carried to the farthest corner of the grounds. As for me, I was stunned with horror and could not utter a sound.

On the floor, face up, lay Ten Eyck with a knife in his breast. His eyes were like glass and I knew instantly that he was dead. The worst shock, though, yet awaited us. I saw Bill staring intently at some object near the rear door of the shelter. He threw his flash in a circle of light upon it, and we saw that it was a bucket of paint. By the fresh drippings on its exterior I knew it was brown paint. In it was a brush.

I stood transfixed with horror while Bill turned the body of Ten Eyck over. On the back of the coat, as fresh and sticky as the victim's own blood, was a number.

Sketched with the precision of draftsmanship in figures a foot high was the number 82!

WE WENT outside and saw George emerge from the shed where he had been keeping vigil over the cars of Ten Eyck, Furman and Drake. He had heard Bill's yell.

"What's up?" he shouted to us.

"Hell's up!" bawled Bill. "Ten Eyck's stabbed and daubed with a number.

His words must have carried to the porch, for we heard a scream from Mrs. Furman.

At the same instant we saw the gardener, Charley, limping toward us from the direction of his own cabin, with a lantern. Responding to the scream of Mrs. Furman, several figures came out of the house and stood in a dark group on the porch. I heard a medley of excited inquiries.

At that instant I would have given my right arm for Barry Starr. Here, I knew, was a situation away over the heads of Bill and George. Certainly I myself was entirely incompetent to handle it. Bill began whipping futile questions at Charley. George peeped in at the Summer-house, then rejoined us, white lipped and pale.

A hundred yards away, on the house porch, I could see that the group was composed of five people, two male and three female figures. One of the male figures descended the steps and came running toward us. It proved to be Furman. The other man, Drake, remained with the women. Furman assailed me with inquiries, but I had no time for him. My brain was in a turmoil. What would Starr do in a case like this?

Actually it was not my business to take charge. Responsibility belonged to the senior deputy. Nevertheless, Starr had brought me along to help him on this case. He had charged me with a vigil, and I had permitted a second murder to be enacted almost under my eyes. And I saw that Bill and George were hopelessly confused, were looking helplessly toward me for leadership. It was a challenge.

So I took the plunge.

"Bill," I suggested, "suppose you stand guard over Ten Eyck's body. George, let's herd every one else into a common group and keep them there while I phone the sheriff."

Bill took Charley's lantern and went into the Summer-house.

I saw that the group on the porch had descended to the lawn and was moving cautiously toward us. I heard Mrs. Furman call to her husband.

George, Charley, Furman and I met them in the center of the lawn. The three women with Drake were Mrs. Furman, the maid Cora and the cook Maggie.

"Where's Mrs. Judd?" I asked.

"In her room, I suppose," answered Mrs. Furman in a scared voice.

With a shock it occurred to me that Edith Judd might easily have had a knife under her shawl when she went to the Summer-house. Being repulsed during some plea to Ten Eyck, she might have stabbed him.

But then I recalled the bucket of paint. That meant premeditation. Mrs. Judd could not possibly have had a bucket of paint under her shawl. Nor was it conceivable that she could have summoned sufficient nerve to paint a number on Ten Eyck's coat. The mere thought of that gruesome label sent the shivers up my own spine.

An 81 on Judd—an 82 on Ten Eyck!

Nor was that all. For just then a woman, shrieking in hysteria, rushed from the house. She ran the fifty yards to us in apparent panic and then cast herself into the arms of Mrs. Furman.

It was a good minute before she could be calmed sufficiently to make herself clear. Then she handed me a card. It was a blank white card, except for six words printed in pencil, in lettering as precise as the figures found on Judd and Ten Eyck.

"When I went to my room," cried Mrs. Judd, "I found it poked under the casement of my window."

The card read—

If you talk you'll be 83.

George and I directed every one to the house and into the living room. Charley, the gardener, asked to be excused, but I made him limp along with us. There was no reason to suspect him, though. To my mind the guilt lay between Furman and Drake. Furman was sweating like a Turk, as pallid as a ghost. Drake, the professional dinner guest, had a much better hold on himself. He had changed to dinner clothes, and the immaculate pleats of his shirt somehow offended me. I much preferred the shaggy and disheveled Furman.

Either of them, though, might be guilty. Ten Eyck was out of it. True, Ten Eyck could have shot Judd and later, as the net tightened, he could have stabbed himself. But could he have painted 82 on his own back?

Charley the gardener? His opportunity for both crimes had been the best of all and he could the most easily have provided himself with paint. But there was no hint of a motive involving Charley.

One of the women? Except for the paint, there was every reason to suspect Edith Judd. She had been there with Ten Eyck very close to the time of his death. By her tears, she had probably quarreled with him. As for the warning placed at her own window, she might have done that herself. A clever ruse to place her in the category of the oppressed—for if she labeled herself 83, who would believe that she had murdered 81 and 82?

As for the others, the only one of

whose innocence I felt entirely assured was the sturdy Irishwoman, Maggie Ryan.

And yet who could pick up, in an hour or a day, the threads from which eight lives were woven? A grudge, born of a wrong enacted years ago by Geoffry Judd, might explain everything. Or a touch of insanity. The only certain facts were that Judd had arrived home late Thursday night with a bag of money, had been shot, that the money was missing and that Ten Eyck had been stabbed.

I LEFT George with them and went to the telephone. I called up the county sheriff and told him about Ten Eyck. I urged him to get in touch with Starr, who had gone to Lewiston after Attorney Paddington, and told him that the household would be kept in a group until his arrival with Starr.

That was about all I could do.

I returned to the living room. Calling George aside, I suggested that he look for stains of paint or blood in every room of the house.

"If they're there, they'll stay there until Starr arrives," he objected. "I'll do better if I help you keep this crew on the carpet." And perhaps he was right.

I turned to Mrs. Judd. I explained to her that she need make no statement unless she wished, but that she would ultimately be asked why she had joined Ten Eyck in the Summer-house and what happened while she was there.

To my surprise she volunteered a statement.

"I knew he was there," she said listlessly. "From my window I saw him enter the Summer-house, and I went to join him."

"Did you find him alone?" I inquired.

"Yes. I asked him to go away. He laughed at me. He told me he would go when he got good and ready, and not before."

"I take it, then, that Ten Eyck was an unwelcome guest at Hillhaven?"

"Yes."

"May I inquire why?"

"You may inquire," she answered, "but I shall not tell you. I'll never tell. The only others who might have told, my husband and Ten Eyck, are dead."

With the last words the woman's voice rose shrilly and wildly; then she collapsed into the arms of Mrs. Furman.

Drake leaned forward and whispered a word of comfort into her ear. Furman stirred uneasily. In a moment he arose to leave the room, but George caught his arm roughly and told him to sit down.

It seemed to me, however, that Mrs. Judd's own statement had practically cleared Drake and the Furmans. She had admitted the existence of some secret which she would guard until the bitter end, also that the two victims were the only humans who might have divulged that secret.

So matters stood when we heard an automobile pull up in front of the house.

I hoped that it was Starr. But it wasn't. He who entered the house and joined us in the living room proved to be a small, grave and oldish man of clerical aspect and wearing old fashioned sidewhiskers.

He seemed to know Mrs. Judd, but she was weeping in the arms of Mrs. Furman and did not greet him. He turned to me.

"My name's Paddington. Is Mr. Starr here?"

"Starr went to Lewiston to look you up," I answered eagerly.

"We must have passed each other on the way," he said. "For the last two days I've been quail hunting. When I returned this evening my wife told me that Mr. Starr had phoned, wanting to know about the will of Geoffry Judd. The evening papers then informed me of Judd's death, a fatality at first accepted as suicide, with later indications of murder."

"Murder it was," I said grimly. "And only an hour ago a guest here, by the name of Ten Eyck, was murdered on the lawn."

At my mention of the name Ten Eyck he started.

"The papers gave the guest list at Hillhaven," he said, "and so I knew that Ten Eyck was here. In fact, that is why I came, without delay, to offer in evidence the will of Mr. Judd."

"Was there a will?"

The question came in a voice of surprise from Edith Judd, who had partially regained her composure. By her expression I was convinced that her surprise was genuine and that she had believed her husband died intestate.

"There was and is," answered Paddington. "He made it a year ago in my office and left it with me."

"Does it mention such a number as 80, or 81?" I asked anxiously.

This query obviously puzzled the attorney.

"No," he said, "but it does mention the name Ten Eyck. I think, under the circumstances, it had better be made public without delay."

From his inside pocket he drew the last will and testament of Geoffry Judd.

PADDINGTON clipped his pince-nez to the bridge of his nose and looked grimly over them as he unfolded the will. As he waited one might have heard the dropping of a pin. Mrs. Judd was sitting up now, frail and pale. A look of resignation was forming in her eyes, as though she knew that whatever secret had cost two men their lives was about to be exposed.

"The first and final paragraphs," began Paddington, "are without import. It is the central paragraph which is vital and which conveys the one and only bequest."

He read aloud:

> "I, Geoffry Judd, do now will and bequeath all of my estate, without reservation, to my faithful helpmate and companion for these last sixteen years, Edith Ten Eyck."

That was all. And for a moment I did not grasp the inference.

"What does it mean?" asked Mrs. Furman.

"All I know," returned Paddington, "is that Mr. Judd dictated those exact words to me a year ago. He offered no explanation. I asked none. But I presume it means that the woman you know as Mrs. Judd is not the widow, and never was the wife, of Geoffry Judd."

He looked keenly at the woman we knew as Edith Judd.

She sat for a moment as still and white as marble. Then, suddenly, she relaxed. Her hands unclenched. She sank back with a sigh of relief rather than of despair, as though the revelation had snapped the strain under which she had long labored.

She faced Paddington bravely, saying:

"No, I am not, in the eyes of the law, the widow of Geoffry Judd. But what of it? Law is cold and love isn't. I am not ashamed. But here is my story:

"Seventeen years ago Archibald Ten Eyck married me in England and took me to his coffee plantation in Ceylon. I was hardly more than a child. My family had opposed my union with Ten Eyck, and I too quickly regretted it. The Ceylon plantation was a swampy wilderness and I had no white neighbors. I was lonely; my husband neglected me and was drunk oftener than sober."

Edith Judd, as we knew her, paused for a moment. Her thin, blue veined hands were plucking at the fringe of her shawl. She continued:

"At times he would stay drunk for a week. I stood it as long as I could and then ran away to Colombo. I was uncertain what to do. My people, I knew, would never receive me back. Sick, frightened, discouraged—it was then I met Geoffry Judd. He was sympathetic. He wanted me to divorce Ten Eyck and marry him; but this, we found, could not be done."

As Edith again paused, I asked Paddington why a divorce would have been difficult.

"Because," he explained quietly, "she married a Britisher and was living with him on British soil. The divorce, then, would have to be applied for in a British court. English law does not sympathize with a wife's loneliness in whatever home her lord and master provides, whether it be a flat in London or a swamp in Ceylon. Technically, in this case, it was the wife who deserted the home, although no doubt she was fully justified. As to Ten Eyck's carousals, she had no witnesses. Nor would it have shocked a British court even if she had proved that Ten Eyck, a colonial planter, was a hard drinker."

"In the end," resumed the woman, "Geoffry Judd offered me his name and his protection for the rest of my life. We came to America on his yacht. He brought me here to Hillhaven. For a long time I was in terror lest Ten Eyck find me. But sixteen years went by and I had almost forgotten him when, a month ago, he came. He just walked in and said—" her voice wavered— "that he had come for his wife.

"A number of friends were here at the time, including Basil Drake. Mr. Judd and I did not dare explain the true character of Ten Eyck, so we were forced to introduce him as a guest. He was perfectly at ease. He demanded that I pack up and accompany him the next day to Canada. Mr. Judd, long in ill health, was so shocked that he attempted suicide in the garage. This was unsuccessful, but it frightened Ten Eyck into showing his hand. He told Mr. Judd that for a hundred thousand dollars he would go away and never disturb us again. Mr. Judd, playing for time, asked for a month to raise the money. Ten Eyck agreed, and left us for a month."

"I wonder," I remarked to the attorney during a pause, "why Ten Eyck went to all that trouble. Why didn't he simply sue the millionaire, Judd, for alienation of his wife's affections? Any American court would have given him a judgment for a hundred thousand."

"But the alienation took place on British soil," reminded Paddington. "Ten Eyck was a British subject, and no British court can render a judgment against an American's fortune. No, all Ten Eyck could do was demand his wife or threaten exposure unless Judd paid him off. Exposure, when we consider the high social standing of the Judds, would have been something of a tragedy."

"It explains," I answered aside to Paddington, "a thing which often puzzled me. Wealthy people generally have a country home for Summer use, but the Judds lived here in this deep New Jersey wilderness the year round. It means that Judd was keeping Edith pretty well out of the limelight, lest Ten Eyck should find her."

"He came back promptly at the end of a month," resumed Edith. "Seeing no other way out, Geoffry agreed to pay the money. Basil Drake again happened to be visiting us, as were the Furmans. Again we were forced to introduce Ten Eyck as a guest."

"We know now," I inserted, "what that graver matter was which drove all consideration of Furman's option from Mr. Judd's mind."

I looked at Furman, who grimaced ruefully. Did this mean, I wondered, that Furman was in the clear? If so, where lay the guilt of two murders? Ten Eyck could have killed Judd but not himself. Was it all leading to a confession that Edith knew Ten Eyck had killed Judd and that she herself had stabbed Ten Eyck in revenge?

THEN again arose that ugly and insurmountable barrier, the numbers 81 and 82. They balked every theory thus far expressed by any of us.

"Mr. Judd," Edith resumed, "went to New York for the money and came back late Thursday night. I believe that Ten Eyck waited up for him, collected, and then in an ensuing quarrel shot Mr. Judd."

"Why did you not testify to the coroner?" inquired Paddington in a tone of rebuke.

"Because I could not do so without exposing the fact that I was Ten Eyck's wife. That would have been an insufferable humiliation. I knew Ten Eyck wouldn't tell about it. He told me why he wouldn't."

"Why?"

"Because so far as he knew, and so far as I knew, there was no will. In the absence of a will, an estate of two million dollars would go to the widow, providing there was a widow. If Ten Eyck told, he would merely expose the fact that there had never been a Mrs. Judd and that there is now no legal widow to inherit two million dollars. Once I got the estate safely, Ten Eyck planned to claim me as a long lost wife.

"He had the astounding nerve to stop by my room this afternoon and explain what he called 'our position'. He explained that an exposure of the facts would automatically disinherit me. That view of it stunned me; I could not even answer him. I remained wretchedly alone all afternoon. Then, at dusk, I saw Ten Eyck enter the lawn shelter. I went there and said, 'I shall not tell about our marriage because it would humiliate me. But I'll give the Judd fortune to charity before I share a cent of it with you. Now get out. I never want to see you again.' "

"And then," supplied the deputy, George, "he laughed at you and you stabbed him!"

"No, she did not stab him."

This statement came from the doorway in a tone of absolute conviction. I looked around and there, standing in the draped arch giving from the hall, stood Barry Starr.

I had not been aware of his arrival. So intent had we all been upon the story told by Edith Ten Eyck, whom I shall always think of as Edith Judd, that none of us had even heard Starr's car pull up in front of the house.

Starr was gazing with an expression of compassion upon Edith. In his right hand he held a bulging briefcase. At the moment it did not occur to me that this was the container in which Geoffry Judd had brought a hundred thousand dollars from New York.

"She has told you the truth as far as she knows it," said Starr. "She does not know the significance of the numbers 81, 82 and 83."

By that it was evident that the county sheriff, to whom I had phoned, had gotten in touch with Starr. For the numbers 82 and 83 hadn't cropped up until after Starr's departure from Hillhaven.

"As a matter of fact," continued Starr, "there was nothing sinister about the 81 painted on Mr. Judd's back. The murderer did not know it was there until the next morning. The daubing of that number was purely accidental. It was not put there intentionally by Judd's, the murderer's, or any human hand. Even Ten Eyck did not know it was there until the next day."

"You mean that Ten Eyck did not murder Judd?" I exclaimed.

"He did not murder Judd. But Ten Eyck saw the murderer leave the study, by way of the garage, at 11:10 night before last. Ten Eyck, keen to collect his hundred thousand, was up and clandestinely waiting for Judd. He saw the murderer leave the study. He looked in and saw Judd lying dead on the couch. But Ten Eyck, lurking in the shadows of the garage intent on extortion, was in no position to raise a cry. The hundred thousand dollars had now been taken by the murderer, but for Ten Eyck there still remained the prospect of cutting in on the huge Judd fortune as soon as it could be inherited by the presumed widow. To do this, it was to Ten Eyck's interest for the affair to be construed as a suicide. So he did not accost the murderer. Instead, Ten Eyck circled the house, entered his room by a window and emerged into the hall, joining the others.

"The next afternoon, after the officers had taken the body away and the affair had been safely adjudged suicide, Ten

Eyck sought out the murderer. 'Give me the hundred thousand,' he demanded. 'By rights it's mine, for Judd was bringing it to me. If you don't, I'll denounce you as a murderer.'

"The murderer, knowing that it was against Ten Eyck's own interests to inform, refused. Later, after I arrived to investigate a murder theory, the murderer became frightened and capitulated to Ten Eyck. The two made an appointment in the Summer-house for just after dusk this evening, where the murderer was to deliver the loot to Ten Eyck. But at the tryst Ten Eyck, instead of the money, got a knife in his breast."

ALL this while I had been gazing from face to face in the room. My gaze finally rested on Furman. He was pale, his brow was glistening with sweat; his rumpled, shaggy hair and his startled stare at Starr gave him a look of wildness. His pallor, I realized, might be because of the narrowness of his own escape, or it might be from dread of an exposure about to be pronounced by Starr.

As for Basil Drake, he was easily the least agitated in the room. Nor could I see any good reason to suspect him. There was no reason why he should have been waiting up for Judd. Furman, fervidly hoping for his option money, might well have been there. But not Drake.

The women . . . There were four of them, and only Edith Judd had so far been exonerated by Starr. Starr had, however, used no pronoun in referring to the murderer.

"When it came time to deal with Ten Eyck," resumed Starr, "the murderer was prepared to make capital of the 81 found on Judd. That 81 had left us floundering and was getting us farther and farther from the truth. It suggested, if anything, some deep dyed Oriental mystery; or at least a revenge motive harking back to some intricately involved circumstance of the past. To further such a theory, the murderer came prepared to paint an 82 on Ten Eyck. The final touch was to slip a card with 83 on it under Mrs. Judd's window sash. Had Judd by chance been daubed with a 66, the murderer would have used a 67 on Ten Eyck and a 68 on the card. The slipping of the card under Mrs. Judd's casement was accomplished just after dark, at a time of confusion, when it was quite easy for the murderer to slip unseen along the side porch."

"Those numbers, then, were nothing but herrings dragged over the true trail of the crime?" asked Paddington.

"Good evening, Mr. Paddington." Starr smiled, greeting the attorney for the first time. "Sorry I missed you at Lewiston; we must have passed each other along the road. Here, since you're an attorney for the Judd estate, take charge of his money. It's all there—one hundred and seventy thousand dollars."

Starr tossed the briefcase to Paddington, who caught it like a football, in his stomach. He was so surprised as he crouched there with it, doubled up, that his pince-nez jolted to the point of his nose and his eyes were like saucers. He was solemnly ludicrous.

"You mean the loot?" I cried. "But that would be only a hundred thousand!"

"You'll find a hundred thousand in currency and seventy thousand in Liberty bonds," said Starr. "Evidently Judd intended to make good his promise to Furman. All the cash he could raise in the time available was the bribe for Ten Eyck, but he brought along seventy thousand in Liberty bonds for Furman's option. I haven't, however, fully answered Mr. Paddington's question. The numbers 82 and 83 were herrings across a true trail, yes, but the murderer's motive for using them went deeper than that. They completed a sequence. The 82 was unquestionably an 82 and the 83 was unquestionably an 83; therefore who would believe *that the 81 was not an 81?*

"As a matter of fact, it wasn't. As long as we thought it was, the murderer

was safe. Since 82 and 83 follow 81, as the night the day, their use made the murderer doubly safe. 81, read literally, was not dangerous to the murderer; he was willing to let us wrestle with it for an eternity and hoped we would. The dangerous number was 18, as an 81 would appear in a mirror. 18, the price per gallon of gasoline freshly painted in bold figures at the murderer's filling station, was the one and only clue to the crime."

Before we could recover from this jolt, Starr turned and shouted to some one on the porch—

"Sheriff, bring him in."

The county sheriff appeared in our midst, dragging with him the handcuffed culprit, Guy Hulick.

"How did Hulick do it?" I asked Starr an hour later when, after leaving the sheriff in charge, we drove away from Hillhaven.

"Driving home Thursday night," Starr explained, "Judd had a flat tire. A real detective would have known that, but I missed it a mile."

"Why should you have known it?"

"Because there was brown mud on Judd's spare; three of his wheel tires were likewise muddy, but the fourth wheel tire was clean. The last mudhole he could have gone through was that place on the main highway, two miles beyond Hulick's, where they're raising an embankment. Evidently a change of tires was made *after* passing that mud.

"Now a sixty year old millionaire portering one hundred and seventy thousand dollars late at night will not stop to change his own tire. He will keep going on the flat until he gets to a filling station, which in this case would be Hulick's.

"At 10:30 P.M. Hulick was on the point of closing up. A new price of gasoline, dictated by competition, was to become effective at midnight. To have this new price, 18 cents, in evidence for his first customer of the morrow, Hulick posted it as he prepared to close up Thursday evening. He took away a price board marked 19, painted 18 on a new board and hung it against one of the squat, concrete columns which support his canopy. Just then Judd drove up and required service. While Hulick changed tires, Judd stood by, leaning against a convenient column. In the indifferent light, neither Judd nor Hulick noticed that Judd was leaning against fresh brown paint. Nevertheless the number 81 became printed on Judd's back.

"Hulick noticed that Judd was nervous and impatient and that he kept a tight hold on a bulging briefcase. Probably Judd stooped to hand Hulick a tool and Hulick noticed a pistol in Judd's hip pocket. An unusual circumstance, for Judd never carried a pistol. Possibly Judd, not fearing Hulick, dropped some indiscreet remark. At any rate, Hulick got a hint that there was a large fortune in the briefcase.

"He determined to find out. He didn't want any evidence of violence at his filling station; so as Judd drove away Hulick perched himself on the spare tire which he had just bolted to the rear of Judd's sedan. All that dark ten miles through the woods to Hillhaven, he was an unsuspected passenger of Judd's. This was far safer than for Hulick to follow in his own flivver, in which case Judd would have heard his motor. Hulick still didn't know whether the game was worth the candle. His arrival at the Hillhaven garage with Judd gave him a chance to find out.

"IN THE garage, Judd stepped out of the car with his briefcase. He unlocked the door of his study and entered. His first act there was to sit down on the couch and sort the seventy thousand in Liberties due Furman from the hundred thousand in cash due Ten Eyck. Doing so, he exposed the entire stake to the spying Hulick. Hulick held him up. Knowing that Judd a month ago had tried suicide, Hulick shot Judd with Judd's own pistol. Judd fell, dying, there on the couch, the 81 still un-

seen by him. Hulick fled with the loot, walked ten miles back to his filling station without dreaming that Ten Eyck had witnessed the crime."

"How," I inquired, "did Ten Eyck recognize Hulick, whom he could not have seen oftener than once before?"

"No doubt Judd," explained Starr, "in his amazement at the appearance of Hulick in his study, voiced his amazement with some such exclamation as, 'What the devil are you doing here, Hulick?' If not, then the cap and jumper which Hulick wears would have given Ten Eyck a hint of his identity."

"When," I asked "did Hulick first learn of the stain on Judd's coat?"

"Probably at daylight next morning, when he saw that his price sign was smeared. So Hulick put up a new board, in black and in smaller letters, with the price marked 17. That night we bought gas there and I remarked that it was the cheapest rate we had encountered; but I completely overlooked it as a clue."

"Why," I asked, "didn't Judd, as he drove to Hillhaven, leave a daub of brown on the back of his automobile seat?"

"The paint, almost absorbed by the serge fabric of his coat, was drying fast. Later it left only a very faint smudge on the couch. Driving in the dark on a crooked road, impatient to get home, Judd probably leaned forward as I am now. If his back touched the back of the seat at all, it touched lightly.

"Let's return to Hulick. He hid the loot. He exulted when the officials and Drake brought the body by at noon on Friday, calling it suicide. But an hour later Ten Eyck confronted him. Not for a drink, but to demand a hundred thousand dollars.

"Hulick refused; he believed that Ten Eyck, evidently in a precarious position himself, was bluffing. Ten Eyck said, 'If you don't come across by a certain hour tonight, I'll ring up the district attorney.'

"He left. Hulick still thought he was bluffing. Actually he was. But Ten Eyck chanced to be in the company of Furman when the daubed coat was found, which forced him to telephone the authorities. En route to respond, you and I got gas at Hulick's. He heard me remark that Ten Eyck had telephoned, hinting murder. That threw Hulick in a panic. He had to make his peace with Ten Eyck.

"There was no way he could beat us to Hillhaven. Then he recalled his ruse with Judd. So as we drove out, he perched on our spare tire rack; for the second time he rode, an unknown stowaway, to Hillhaven."

"You mean we actually hauled the murderer back to the scene of his crime?" I gasped.

"We did just that. We even hauled one of his tools. Hulick, while filling us with gas, had about five minutes to think. If a murder theory had replaced suicide, his cue was to make it appear that guilt lay among the inmates at Hillhaven. He guessed rightly that the only clue would be brown paint stains on Judd's coat. So he picked up the same brush with which he had once painted a brown 18, and held this in his hand as he rode our spare to Hillhaven. Jolting along, this brush daubed our tire. We found the clue, but fumbled it.

"When we were admitted by the maid, Hulick got off of our tire rack. He threw the brush away, wanting it to be found on the premises. In the dark he circled the house to Ten Eyck's window, tapped there, conferred with Ten Eyck while we conferred with Edith Judd in the parlor. He arranged a division of loot, possibly offering to let Ten Eyck have the cash if he, Hulick, might keep the bonds. Or vice-versa. A meeting for this payment was set for just after dark the next evening at the Summer-house; there Ten Eyck, instead of the cash, got six inches of steel."

We turned on to the main highway, whirling by a filling station which was as dark as the certain fate of its master.

"But how," I asked, "did you manage the detection?"

"I didn't manage it," admitted Starr with a snort of disgust. "The detection was as flukish as the 81 on Judd. This evening, Ben, you phoned the county sheriff, telling him to get in touch with me and come immediately.

"He phoned Lewiston and got me. He was one way along the main highway from Hulick's and I was the other. I suggested that we meet at Hulick's and I would explain the case as we drove to Hillhaven. I added that I wanted to stop at Hulick's anyway, to find out if Hulick had bootlegged a drink of liquor to Ten Eyck at 1:20 Friday.

"The sheriff reached Hulick's twenty minutes before I did. Hulick wasn't there, not having had time to return from his meeting with Ten Eyck. The sheriff waited, his brain in a whirl. He was away beyond his depth in this mystery and without the foggiest idea where to begin. Then he recalled my saying I wanted to find out if Hulick had bootlegged liquor to Ten Eyck.

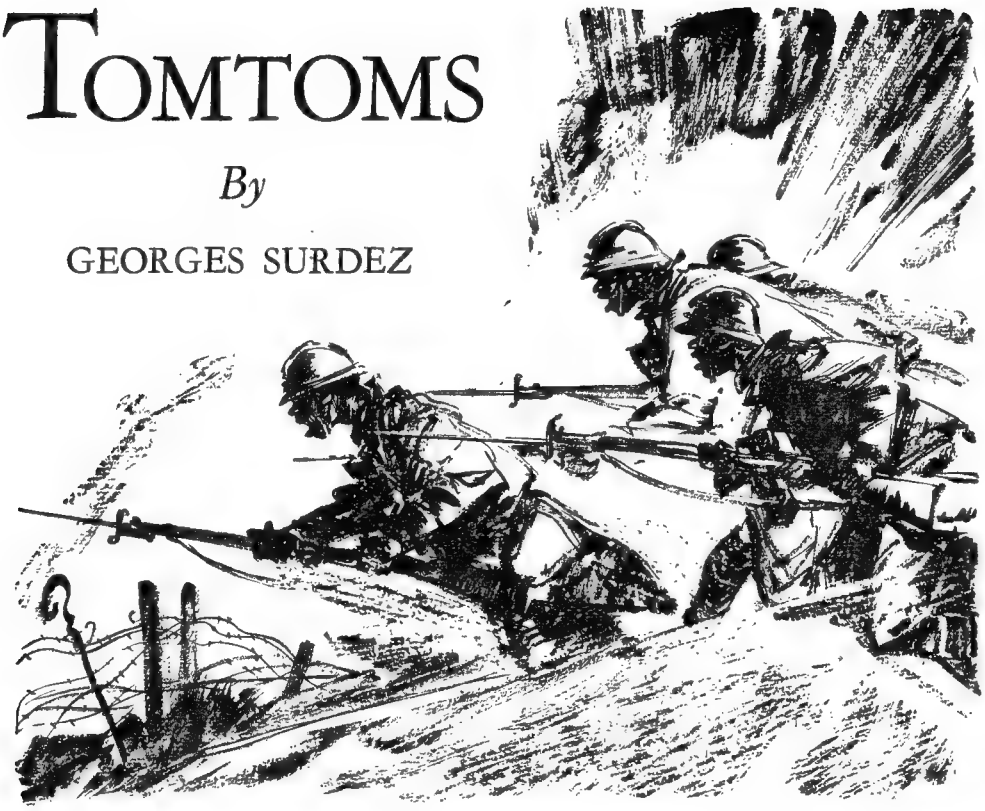
"Actually I didn't give a darn whether it was pink pop or pale gin peddled out by Hulick. My angle was to check an alibi for Ten Eyck. But the sheriff thought I was reflecting on the character of Hulick. Here was a straw that the sheriff knew how to grasp. Frisking a wayside pop stand for booze was a thing he had often done. So now, while waiting for me and in the absence of Hulick, he began frisking.

"Unconsciously I had whittled the case right down to the sheriff's size. He was a first rate frisker, and even turned up a floor board in Hulick's living quarters. He found no liquor, but he did find Judd's hundred and seventy thousand dollars. I arrived. Then Hulick arrived—and we pinched him."

TOMTOMS

By

GEORGES SURDEZ



A Story of the French Colonials

TWILIGHT does not last long in Senegal. The light waned rapidly in the cell occupied by Mahmoud Ali Demba at the military prison of Dakar. He tossed aside *The Star of the Future,* which he had been scanning, rose and yawned.

Demba was a magnificent negro, a true Woloff, blackest of the blacks. His small, bullet shaped, woolly skull almost touched the ceiling; when he flexed his long arms his thick muscles swelled the sleeves of the worn uniform coat. He was twenty-two, stood over six feet, weighed more than two hundred pounds. His body was made to last a century. Yet he was to die within a few weeks.

Despite the flaming editorial of the newspaper, he did not delude himself with vain hope. The first court-martial had condemned him to be shot for several grave crimes: refusal to obey orders, inciting his subordinates to mutiny, complicity and probable participation in the murders of several white men, one of them an officer. Powerful friends in France and his influential family in Senegal had obtained this new trial, which Demba felt would be a waste of time.

The same witnesses would be called to repeat the same stories, the evidence once produced would be produced again, the identical arguments would be employed by the prosecution. Members of the court-martial, influenced by

papers clamoring for an example to be made, would confirm the first sentence.

"Military degradation. Death!"

Demba was irked by the needless delay. He had wearied of the long speeches which meant nothing and led nowhere. His fate was to be led out in the not remote future, publicly stripped of stripes and decorations, executed before massed troops. There could be no pardon, no lighter sentence. This was rather a relief to the sergeant, as death was preferable to the miserable existence of a convict in Guiana.

He loved life as a normal man should. But he was not afraid to die. Nevertheless, owing to this new trial, there would be many who would believe that he had pleaded for this second chance, that he had fretted over his approaching end, that he had struggled for a few additional days of life. For he was aware that there were many who, in his plight, would have felt despair and terror.

Fear of death?

The thought made him grin. The strong white teeth gleamed in the sooty, coarse featured face, in which the eyes lighted a startling flame of intelligence. All his people had been warriors, leaders. He was a Moslem, had learned early that nothing befell a man save by the will of Allah. And four years of war in France had made him familiar with danger. Consequently, he ate heartily and slept ten hours a day.

When the time came he would walk out to face the rifles. Military degradation? The ceremony could not humiliate him. They might tear the metals and ribbons from his chest, but they could not undo the deeds that had won them. It would be a few bitter minutes to endure. He knew himself; his nerves would not fail him.

A key rasped in the lock, a guard entered. He was a Senegalese, but of another tribe, a stocky, lighter hued Lebbou. He joined his bare heels and saluted, for, pending final decision, Demba was still a sergeant and his superior.

"*Diama gam,* Sergeant! The lawyer is here," he announced gravely.

"*Salam diam,* Sissey! Tell him I have no need of him. Tell him that I sleep."

The guard left, turned the key. Demba lighted one of the cheap cigars supplied him by outside sympathizers, rested on the cot. It was a matter of a few days, weeks. Then it would be over. There had been the world before his birth, there would remain the world after his death. Why worry?

DEMBA'S father was in the employ of the French government, although his father's father had fought the French for many years in the days of the conquest. But though he served the republic, he was proud of his blood.

The grandson of a man who had ruled territories larger than France could not grow up an ordinary man. When Demba was six years old his father decided it was time that he start learning his duties and his rights. The question of funds did not enter into consideration, for the family was very wealthy according to local standards. There were inherited lands, herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and the offerings of the lesser people, who paid homage to the family according to traditions, although legal taxes were levied by France.

Demba was sent north into Mauritania, placed in care of a venerable Moorish *marabout,* who knew the Koran by heart, the customs of African people, Arabs, Moors and blacks, and many subjects not too easily defined. They bordered on what the Europeans called psychology, diplomacy and politics. Demba, then no taller than a small oil keg, with a rounded belly from indulgence in rice and millet, lived under the tent with his teacher's family.

He too learned the Koran by heart; he answered questions, passed tests. He was such a good pupil that he was not beaten every day. He grew conscious of the place which he was to hold among men, learned that courage, honesty, stoicism were not achievements for one

ten food." The private halted. "Go in there. And I wish you luck."

The building was more pretentious than the others, larger, with whitewashed walls and a wooden veranda. Demba entered the first door he found open. The room was some sort of office; there were fly specked lists of names pinned to the walls.

A white man was asleep in a chair, his head rested on folded arms propped on a table. He wore dirty, patched khaki trousers, cord soled sandals, no socks; his torso was nude and sweating. Demba saw a coat with sergeant's chevrons on the sleeves hanging from a hook beneath a battered colonial helmet. The man awoke, rubbed hairy forearms over his eyes. He had not shaved in several days, and bits of lint clung to his bristling whiskers.

Demba knew that the white sergeant had allowed himself to slip, had reached the stage corresponding to that of a negro who starts wearing multicolored ties, yellow shoes and checkered suits in France. Gone native, that was all. He saluted, reported.

"Demba, eh? Demba? Old Man Demba's kid? I'm Sergeant Tozar. We have three other white sergeants here. They're fishing, or drunk, or asleep. I don't know. As for Charlier, he's sleeping his off."

"Drunk?"

"You're talking, he's drunk. Why don't you sit down, Snowball?" Tozar noticed that Demba did not like the name, smiled and shrugged. "That's true. Since we got you down from your coconut trees and shipped you to France, you've become sensitive. We've had plenty like you here. All right, be seated, my dear colleague."

"This place is in a mess," Demba said.

"Not our fault. We can't get anything repaired. And the demobilization is slow. New men come all the time and stagnate here for weeks. I'd give them each a quick, hearty kick in the slack of their pants and tell them to swim home, if I had my way. Look at me, three years on this dump, and no chance of being discharged until the last monkey is up the last tree. Three years!"

"The trenches were not comfortable, either."

"All right, warrior!" Tozar laughed. "You won the war and you have pretty knicknacks pinned all over you. You're a knight of civilization left too long in the oven. That goes with me. Take my advice, though, and don't say anything like that to Charlier. He's pure hell these days."

"Sorry he missed the fighting?"

"Be yourself, boy. No, he can't get absinthe any more, for love or money. He says that damned Pernod imitation gives him the blues. And how he hates blacks! How he hates them! Can't blame him—he's seen them enough in the last five years! But the returned soldiers sicken him more than the others." Tozar located a bottle, drew the cork with his teeth and swigged. "Ah! Luck to you, pal. Have a drink?"

"I don't use alcohol," Demba replied.

He had used it too much occasionally in the past, but intended to mend his ways. His father was right. Sin there was in the first drop, and madness later.

"You're the first nigger who comes back and doesn't swill like a Breton sailor. You don't drink, but you have a swelled head, I can see that. A damned wise thing to send you guys to France, I'll say. A damned wise thing!"

"Who asked to go?" Demba said. "But listen, I have a trunk—"

"Which, I'll bet, you tote by the handle now, instead of on your head the way you did before you went to war! Well, stick it anywhere. Kick some privates from a hut."

Demba went out, selected a hut, ordered two privates to clean it. They obeyed sulkily, laughed behind his back, and he heard them say he was a tool of the Frenchmen. Tozar had followed him, eager to talk to a fresh listener, and obtained obedience, silence, with a few cuffs.

"You've got to be tough, fellow. Sock

right into them. You look like you could do it, and that's all they understand." The Frenchman sank on the trunk, breathing hard. "You're full of yourself, but you look like a good egg. So I'll tell you all about Charlier. You need to know—"

"Shoot—"

"He had a fine position in France, back in 1912. He played the fool over a woman, had to leave. Came here as a commercial employee. Drank and lost that job. No cash to go back. Picked up work here and there, jobs such as a white man down on his luck can grab out here with cheap firms, at a few francs a month. Lived like a bush black, almost.

"Along came the war. He had been a sergeant, held a commission as a reserve lieutenant. The regular officers were all crazy to get to the Front, so he was stuck here as an instructor. On this island since September, 1914!

"He did a fine job at the beginning. His task was to receive the recruits, take the rough edges off them, teach them right from left, teach them to count up to four, then to form fours. As the months went by, the recruits were not so good, not so smart. When I got here, in '16, we were getting men already from the devil knows where, back bush dumps where they had never heard of boats, locomotives or guns.

"Some of them couldn't talk anything human, and couldn't learn to. When you got sore and raised your voice, or lifted your hand, they'd get scared, squat and hide their eyes. You'd hand them a can of corned beef, and they wouldn't know it was food. We kept hearing from the Coast—turn them out, turn them out. We were worked to death, fellow. There were days when we all went mad, every white man here, and there were fourteen, at that time, including two officers.

"I've seen Charlier so hoarse he couldn't talk, from yelling at the men. He used to say that he could see their grinning black mugs in his sleep. That drove him to the bottle once more. He was careful for a long time, then something happened and he didn't care any more.

"It happened this way: Charlier had applied to go to the Front, but decision was pending. We were getting a new lot of guys, fellows with slashes down their cheeks, Senoufos and Korokos from the Kong region, who came overland via Wagadougou. They were dumb, so dumb that they'd pass up beef stew, and hunted rats for tidbits. You'd have to hold their right hand and yell, 'Right!' After fifty times, they'd get it right once out of three tries.

"Right in the middle of training that batch, up comes a colonel on inspection. The idiot brings his wife along! We had our swine lined prettily, and we had given rifles to a whole section, bright lads. We made a fair showing at first. Our guys were a bit slow, confused. They had seen few white women, and stared at the colonel's wife all the time. Not that they thought her pretty. To them she was a monster, with her blond hair, her powdered face and her lips that looked bloody. They were scared, and kept an eye on her.

"Suddenly she snaps open a black case she carried, pulls out a camera, aims it at the bunch, showing her teeth in a friendly smile. All those birds had ever seen come out of a case slung on the hip was a service revolver, which usually went off with a bang and hit something mighty hard. They probably thought she was snarling at them, lost their nerve.

"We sergeants had to get them one by one, out of the bushes, patting them like frightened puppies. Charlier said something to the lady that the colonel did not like. Maybe he did knock the camera from her hand; I can't say for sure. I was trying to quiet the fools.

"That finished Charlier. He did not get transferred. Bawled out by the colonel, he received official blame later. Do you wonder that he lost interest after that?"

Demba nodded. He had seen blacks of the tribes mentioned by Tozar. They had been brave in their own way and, after learning what was expected of them, had served valiantly. At the Front their devotion, their loyalty to their white leaders, had been proverbial. But, undoubtedly, it had been an undertaking to train them at the start, to smooth them for military use.

"But the war is over," Demba said, as an afterthought. "Being an officer, he can resign. Or at least get leave for his health."

"Won't leave now. You get me, eh?"

"No."

"Good pickings. There are thousands here. He can pick up something on the supplies. The returned guys make it hard, because they know what rations they're supposed to get."

"You mean the lieutenant grafts?"

"Everybody does here. You can make out great, being an interpreter and propaganda guy. Shove names ahead on the list for dismissal, and all that. In a few months we'll all be civilians, and we'll need the money. Even if the Armistice is signed and the country saved, a guy can't live on fried air."

"Won't he get caught?"

"How? People are getting theirs all up the line. No inspector has come in six months. Even if those guys could write, Charlier censors the mail. Once out of here, they forget, or if they talk, who listens to them?"

"What's the routine?" Demba said to change the subject.

Graft was not praiseworthy, but it had to be. Sergeants in charge of supplies, everywhere, lived better than others on very little more pay.

"I mean, the training, the drill."

"What for?"

"Then what do you do, what do the men do, all day?"

Tozar drew Demba to the door by the sleeve. He indicated the ramshackle encampment, the loafing soldiers, the bush covering the unoccupied area of the island. The surface of the river gleamed all around, like the belly of a snake in the sun. The shores were remote, misty. The spot was neglected, lonely. There was nothing to stir hope, nothing to urge activity or ambition.

"We fish, take shots at crocodiles, get drunk and wait. And the men fish, and they wait, admiring the scenery to pass the time." Tozar slapped Demba on the back. "You'll do like them. But cheer up—we won the war!"

FOR a long moment Charlier silently eyed the negro sergeant. Demba withstood this ordeal without flinching. He had served under good chiefs, and this chap did not impress him as formidable. Tozar had told him the commander wished to see him after dinner.

"At ease," Charlier said wearily, at last.

He was sprawled on a cot, arms folded behind his thick neck, supporting his head, one ankle thrown over the other. He was about thirty-six, and had been handsome at one time, when he had taken care of his appearance. He wore nothing save cotton trousers. His shoulders and arms, showing traces of good muscles under layers of fat, were flecked with mosquito bites and scratches. His stomach evidenced the protruding, ovoid shape known locally as "the colonial egg".

"You are familiar with Senegal, Sergeant?"

"I'm Senegalese, Lieutenant."

"But I understand you've been in France many years. Conditions have changed. We are faced with the returned soldier problem. In contact with the worst elements of France, worked upon by communist propaganda, the blacks are trying to walk erect before learning to stand. I have my own conception of the actual purpose of this depot, of this island.

"You've heard of delousing plants? Well, the returned blacks have brought with them much worse than lice. They've brought wrong notions. And my pur-

pose is to cleanse them. Rapidly! Right here, they start living as Africans."

Demba smiled slowly. He knew that the words were aimed at him, meant to wound his pride.

"You do not reply, Sergeant Demba?"

"*Mon Lieutenant,* you made statements. You did not question."

"What do you think of conditions here?"

"This camp is a disgrace to the army."

"Thank you. That's frank. I like it." Charlier crooked up one leg, watched the smoke of his cigaret. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-two, Lieutenant."

"The age of ideals. You're filled with poorly digested reading. I shall make allowances for that. You were sent here to make speeches, to serve as a contact man between me and my men. Forget that. I don't need you. Amuse yourself as best you can; keep out of my way. Remember that despite all that is written, you are a black. I am a white man, a lieutenant. Consequently, I am always right, whatever happens. That understood, we will get along charmingly."

"That is my wish, Lieutenant."

"What matters? But I'm glad, nevertheless. By the way, your letters must be written in French, submitted to me for censorship. I have an idea. You like soldiering—that's obvious from your appearance. We have an armed section here, for police work. Take charge of it, drill, shoot. Keep good uniforms in reserve, to greet an inspector. An inspector properly greeted and saluted is a satisfied inspector. Remember that in the future. You may go."

Demba reformed the armed section of forty-eight men. He dismissed Woloffs, Serers, Saracolets, all speech makers and restless souls, and selected Bambaras to replace them. The lean, chocolate colored Sudanese are born soldiers, who revel in serving neatly.

The sergeant soon noticed that the men would group after nightfall, whisper among themselves. He knew they were longing to be home, fretted at the long delays. Demba was issued good rations, those he had drawn in France. But the others lived on rice and millet, with occasional distributions of smoked fish purchased in the vicinity.

They spoke of the corned beef, the macaroni, the wine, the coffee, the sugar, which they had received in Europe. All these things were luxuries to them, of course, but they were entitled to obtain such things until discharge. They felt that some one was grafting, taking the food from their mouths.

A large, truculent Sudanese, Mamin, was conspicuous. He had studied French, as a boy, and had adopted communist theories while in France. His military record was superb and vile at the same time. Extremely brave under fire, he had been lacking in discipline elsewhere. Citations alternated with punishments. He pointed out that the French, despite their protestations that all men were born free and equal in rights, catered to the big chiefs of Africa. The best jobs were for the sons and grandsons of kings, chiefs, warriors. The offspring of the sanguinary tyrant of the Sudan, Samory, were holding commissions in the army of France, continued to hold sway over lesser people. There was an example in the camp of such favoritism: Demba, grandson of Ali Demba, the scourge of Galam. Because of his blood, because his father held high office, he was permitted to live as the white men lived.

"Why don't you speak for your people, grandson of á king?" he challenged Demba.

"I am a sergeant. There is discipline."

"You steal as they steal, from us."

Demba struck him in the flank with the side of his extended hand. Mamin went down.

"I have no hatred, Mamin," the sergeant said. "But when such words are spoken, I become again Demba's grandson. We were born free, equal in rights. But my blood differs from yours. A citizen's duty is to obey those placed

above him until they are removed by law. I obey as a man, brook no insults as the son of chiefs. Is that clear?"

Mamin picked himself up, breathed hard.

"Are we treated justly?"

"No. Bide your time."

"You hear him, you fools?" Mamin turned toward the spectators. "He is the grandson of the Great Demba, and he admits we are mistreated. Is that what you wished before acting? The approval of Demba?"

"Aye, that alone we wished, Mamin. Men of his blood never lie."

"Then follow me. I shall speak."

"What are you trying to do?" Demba protested.

"Watch and learn, Demba."

SEVERAL hundred men crowded before the office building. The rumor of voices awoke Tozar, who emerged on the veranda, rubbing his eyes. He saw the horde before him, noticed that some had picked up clubs and stones. He carried no weapon, was almost nude. But he was a white man, did not show fear. He scratched his chin thoughtfully while Mamin shouted complaints and threats.

"What have you to say, Sergeant?"

"Go to the devil, that's all." Tozar squared his shoulders, pushed out his chin. "Now, get off this veranda, and don't come back without asking. Beat it, before the lieutenant spots you."

"I'm not afraid of the thief, the slob—"

"Insults to a superior," Tozar pointed out, quietly. It took courage to speak in level tones to the madman supported by hundreds. "Report at the lockup, Mamin."

Mamin hesitated, and jeering cries broke from the milling mob.

Mamin lost his head and struck Tozar in the face. A gasp of amazement rose; men panted; the sun flashed on knives. If the white man lost his head in his turn, struck back, a riot would follow. The sergeant was not afraid for himself. But he knew that his duty was to prevent further trouble. He wiped the trickle of blood from his nostrils, nodded to Demba, who had fetched the armed section.

Demba obeyed the signal, while a surge of surprised admiration flooded his chest. Tozar was a chief, even if a crook. A panicky man would have struck back. He pushed his wide shoulders through the crowd, his Bambaras prodded men aside with the butts of their rifles. When he reached the veranda, he signaled the armed men to fix bayonets and face the crowd. Then he rested his hand on Mamin's shoulder.

"Come along. You're under arrest."

Mamin, who had stood as if petrified, waiting for a return blow, tried to lunge at Tozar again. But Demba, as was his duty, stopped him. His massive forearm slid beneath the Sudanese's chin, snapped up his head with a jerk.

"Obey, or I'll beat you up."

Mamin tried to free himself, to struggle. But Demba seldom encountered men who could match his strength. The rebel's feet flew off the planking, and he dropped on his head with a thump. For the moment, Demba was all sergeant of Colonial Infantry, and dealt not with a communist but with an unruly private. Mamin rose, and signified surrender.

"What's this uproar?" Charlier asked.

He had appeared in the doorway, wearing his uniform coat. He swept them all with a glance, noticed Tozar's bloodied face, understood. And he probably realized at once that Mamin, placed on trial, would talk. There was one lane of escape for him, and he took it without weakness or hesitation.

"Struck a sergeant? Formed soviets? An example must be made at once. Sergeant Demba!"

"Lieutenant?"

"Take Private Mamin behind the barracks and execute him."

Demba stood at attention, did not move.

"Do you hear me, Sergeant?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. It would be illegal."

"Your responsibility is not involved. You have my order, and enough witnesses to satisfy any investigation. Obey."

"No, Lieutenant."

"You refuse?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Afraid?"

"I don't kill a man of my race on one man's word, Lieutenant."

"All right. Stand aside."

Charlier pushed Demba aside with the flat of his hand, faced Mamin, who was shaking his head to clear his thoughts.

"You admit striking a white sergeant?"

"Yes, and I am not afraid of you, either!"

"No?" Charlier smiled derisively. "You would dare lift your hand against me?"

Mamin's right hand lifted hesitatingly. Charlier's right darted forward from behind his back, a shot sounded. Mamin's head bobbed backward as from a fist blow, his knees sagged. Then his face was veiled with red; he fell to the floor of the veranda, with the top of his skull blown off.

"Section—at my orders! Load!"

The Bambaras, impassive, unlocked the breeches, the brass of cartridges glittered briefly. Demba obeyed with the others.

"I give you men thirty seconds to make off."

The blacks stirred uneasily, turned and walked away slowly.

"Tozar," Charlier resumed quietly, "get into uniform, take charge of the section. See that rifle racks are guarded. Sergeant Demba, surrender your weapons to the sergeant of the guard, go to your quarters, consider yourself under arrest. You refused to obey, showed a sad lack of energy. A report will be sent to Dakar. You'll find what the general attitude is there toward this communist business in Black Africa."

Demba saluted. He understood. Charlier was taking the initiative for good reasons. His report would go in first, shape opinion. After that, all negro witnesses would be considered prejudiced. It was undeniable that there was much unrest among the returned soldiers, and that many of them were unreasonable. An example was needed; fatal phrase, as a rule.

"Oh, Tozar—" Charlier indicated Mamin's body—"have that taken away before it starts to stink."

DEMBA spent the next three days in confinement. He did not worry, first because it was not in his nature to fret over accomplished facts and vague fears for the future, then because he knew his war record would obtain him a suspended sentence. It was logical that obedience at the Front for more than four years would counterweight his refusal to execute an illegal order.

The man who brought him his food declared that the camp was quiet, that the soldiers seemed stunned by what had happened. The Bambaras of the armed section escorted the sergeants on their rounds, still.

On the evening of the third day, Charlier sent for Demba.

"I don't think you are a bad fellow," he started. "I have changed my mind about you. From your own angle, you were justified in refusing. Carrying out the order would have meant the end of your political aspirations. When my first anger calmed, I saw this. It is never bad for a chief to admit loyally, to an inferior in rank, that he was hasty. The staff has accepted my version of the shooting of Mamin, true in its general outline. Therefore, the report I hold against you is still here, and will not be forwarded until further notice."

"The Mamin case is filed, Lieutenant?"

"Yes. And your case will never come to trial, provided you make no further trouble."

Demba saluted.

"May I leave, Lieutenant?"

"I have nothing more to say, Demba," Charlier said, with a puzzled frown, "but I thought that perhaps you might wish to speak—"

"Of what, Lieutenant?"

"Not a word of thanks? No gratitude?"

"What for, Lieutenant? It is your interest to avoid official investigation. You know that I might have something to say during the trial, concerning the facts of Mamin's death. And I shall not give you the opportunity to shoot me. Moreover, my death would attract a certain attention."

Charlier laughed. Demba felt reluctant admiration for him. He was dishonest, a drunkard, but he possessed undeniable qualities of leadership, and a fierce, reckless energy. He had the lightning reflexes of the born man of action.

"Demba, you're not a fool. Good night."

"Am I still under arrest? If not, what are my duties?"

"You are free, within the island. Do what you like."

The next day Demba saw Tozar strolling through the camp toward the river, a fishing line in hand. The other white noncoms had already left to go shooting in canoes, while Lieutenant Charlier had gone to the north shore to visit a trading station located there. The police of the encampment was composed of a half dozen Bambaras, who walked about, stiff and serious.

"Don't you think you'd better stay here, Sergeant?" Demba asked. "After what happened the other day—"

"Bah, they've learned better by this time." Tozar smiled. "The detachments scheduled to leave the next fortnight are held here in reprisals, according to orders from Dakar. Your pals will realize that fussing with us will get the leaders killed and delay the demobilization of the others. The worst bushmen among them know they're licked."

"I'm not sure," Demba hinted. "I know my people—"

"Did you hear a peep out of them since you got out of the jug, Demba?"

"No. That's what worries me."

"What can they do? If they show fight, a battalion of regulars will be up here soon enough. And the old time African officers would not hesitate to turn machine guns loose on a crowd of rebels."

"Don't you think you had best—"

"I'm going fishing!"

With the camp abandoned by the white men, new animation reigned. Groups formed, men argued in their dialects. But when Demba neared them silence fell, and they turned to look at him suspiciously until he left. He caught a few words here and there, but nothing to indicate a plot. The majority seemed to be talking of Mamin.

During the afternoon, several men of his tribe came to see him. Although they spoke casually, he felt that they formed a delegation, sent to probe him as to his attitude in an open conflict.

"What mad scheme are you talking about?" he asked.

"No scheme, Demba. We came to speak to you, because we know you studied both laws, the law of the Koran and that of the French. We are ignorant men, although we fought in the war and learned much of the outside. From your knowledge, will you answer questions?"

"Surely."

"Have we been treated justly?"

"No."

"Have we deserved justice?"

"Yes."

They drew aside, whispered, came back.

"Grandson of Demba, was the killing of our friend Mamin a just thing?"

"It was not."

"Then, do we, his companions, his brothers, owe him revenge? Does not his blood call for blood?"

"The two laws can not be confused. While in uniform, we follow the law of

France. Blood can not be atoned for save through the courts."

"And if the courts do not deal justly with the guilty?"

"Oh, fools! Forget about it all, go to your homes in peace when the time comes."

"That is cowardice, Demba."

"It is wisdom."

"Did our old people prefer wisdom to revenge? Answer truly, according to your blood."

"That time has gone."

"One thing more, Demba, then we are done; did not the officer break his own law when he shot Mamin without trial? And does not breaking the law place one outside the law?"

"The lieutenant broke the law, yes—"

"As we are men, and you are a man, let your grandfather's voice speak through your lips, and with your tongue. What follows blood unjustly spilled?"

Demba sensed the trap, but the evasive arguments refused to come to his lips. And he held himself erect, spoke gravely, as if indeed his grandfather had moved his tongue.

"Vengeance."

THE grapevine system of information functioned on the island, apparently remote from the shores, as it did everywhere in black Africa. Somehow, before Charlier returned from his visit to the traders, it became known that he would not remain long, had decided to leave for the coast.

This news should have brought hope to the soldiers, for they had found white officers to be very honest gentlemen as a rule and any change would be for the better. The sergeants were good, average men, and save for supporting Charlier beyond the strict call of duty, not disliked. Tozar was brutal at times, but in a good natured, humorous fashion which did not arouse intense resentment. All understood dimly that which Demba had reasoned out: A white man who had remained in Senegal during the war could not quite understand what changes had been wrought in the returned soldiers.

After nightfall, for the first time since Mamin had been killed, big fires were lighted along the shore, and the men grouped to dance to the beat of tomtoms. The throbbing of the taut skins rose like a heavy, surging pulse with the music of the home made instruments, improvised guitars and *balafons*. Demba strolled alone by the river, waiting until the feast was well under way before joining the Woloffs' gathering. It was excellent politics for a chief to appear only when the revelry reached its peak, and Demba was, by instinct even more than by training, a chief.

The Bambaras formed a circle of their own, from which shrill shouts lifted regularly, chanting the valor of Samory, and the great exploits of the *sofas*, the "fathers of the horse", the valiant black lancers of the negro conqueror. In the sergeants' bungalow lights showed, and when Demba walked by, he heard singing. Charlier had brought back a supply of bottles.

A bugler blew the nine o'clock call, but no one paid heed. Canoes were sliding toward the island from the shore, and the reflection of the blazing torches quivered in the churned waters. The craft bore many women and a few young men of the neighboring villages, attracted by the fires and the music. Demba was pleased; as long as they amused themselves, the men would not seek quarrels with their chiefs. Charlier would be gone soon, the past forgotten, and the survivors of the war on their way home.

Yet he was worried at times, when the prelude of certain tomtom beats rang with precipitated, martial throbs. The mood of all was not one of peace. Resentment lurked.

Shortly before midnight, a group of his tribe sought him, greeted him.

"I shall join you soon," Demba told them.

"Only when the fires have burned

down to coals, and the moon is strong in the sky," they told him. "For thus a chief acts. For tonight, we are Woloffs, and hence you are king."

Demba laughed. Nevertheless, he was pleased. It was good for men to have memory, to know that ancient things mattered. He rejoiced that the years spent in France had changed neither them nor him altogether, that they had returned to dance and live under the moon. It was not good for men to be neither white nor black, but something unnatural, halfway between. They walked with him, and spoke of his father, of his grandfather, of their sires.

"Ali Demba! We heard of him—he rode a black horse in his last combat. And after he was killed, none could find his body. He vanished like a puff of smoke! Nowhere is he buried, Ali Demba! Maybe—he walks near here tonight!"

The group halted to listen to the tomtoms.

"That is his song, is it not, Demba? The big tomtoms played so before combat, while all listened and drank in courage for the battle! You hear?"

"I hear. It is not good for today," Demba stated.

Five rapid thumps, two slow thumps, and then the quick throb of the charge. And Demba recalled things he had never seen with his eyes—the tall grass swaying before the wind, the cool mist of morning rising from the marshes, and black hordes crested with brilliant war plumes striding forward with a glitter of spears. The sun shone on garish shields, touched brass and steel with sparks of crimson fire—and lined before them, muskets ready, were men in gaudy uniforms, white men with fever wasted faces.

"Demba! Ali Demba!"

Preceded by the huge war tomtoms, a giant on horseback turned his broad face to the foes from over the sea. His powerful chest, his great arms were nude and rippling with muscles. There was a war spear in his fist, and darts in a quiver hung from the skin saddle.

The muskets thundered all at once; white and yellow smoke rolled before the wind, shredded. Spears and arrows took flight, gleaming in the sunlight like a flight of birds. Birds of courage, birds of death.

"Ali Demba! Ali Demba!"

Sergeant Demba, of the French Colonial Infantry, halted short. The clamor was real, men were shouting the war call. This was not right; that cry should not rise in pretense, in play.

A shot sounded, another, a third.

"What happens?" Demba said.

A man grasped his legs around the knees, another bore down on his chest. He fell, struggled to rise. His hands tore and flayed at the bodies nearest him.

"Let go! I must stop it; I must stop it!"

"Forgive us, Demba! It must not be stopped! Your head bids obedience, your heart spoke revenge! They must atone for Mamin tonight! All of them!"

"Brothers can't kill brothers!"

"The chiefs are not our brothers—and the Bambaras even less. Oh, remain here, Demba, and permit us to go, to seek worth like the others!"

Demba freed himself, ran toward the uproar. But he was too late. There were no more shots, and half nude black bodies whirled in the dwindling red glare of the fires, in the pale light of the reborn moon.

Mamin had been avenged.

"THAT head must fall!" the prosecutor shouted, pointing at Demba. "That head must fall. In the name of the Republic, I demand that head. He was away from the scene of the killings, but it was his thought that killed. And he did not incite them to uprise for noble motives, but to save himself from the consequences of his deeds. You have listened to the reading of Lieutenant Charlier's report concerning Sergeant Demba's refusal to obey. Why did he refuse to obey? Because he instigated

the protest made by Mamin, because he was the soul of the rebels. As long as we have law, as long as we have an army, a military code, this man sinned, and must be punished. An example must be made. The law is no respecter of persons. To the law, the grandson of Ali Demba is no more than the grandson of a laborer. I want his head. That head must fall!"

The prosecutor sat down, wiped his dripping face. In the sudden silence, the echo of his words lingered, vibrated. The five officers of the court-martial, veterans of the colonies, veterans of the World War, sat quietly. But all could see that the arguments had struck a response, that they would condemn again.

The clerk of the court cleared his throat, announced—

"The defense—"

Demba's lawyer was Tremali, a half-breed from Martinique, son of a Corsican sergeant and a native woman. His thin, aquiline, yellow face was alive with intelligence, with feeling. But his mind had been warped by his very training for such an occasion. As on the first trial, he would reply with legal words, with synthetic sentiments.

"My task is difficult," he started.

Demba lost patience with him. He was unwilling to hear another useless speech. He rose, waved his hand.

"Monsieur Tremali, sit down!" The sergeant addressed the colonel presiding, a dry, metallic old soldier, "May I speak in my own defense, Mr. President?"

"Granted. But your lawyer will then have to cut his arguments short, Sergeant Demba."

"I don't want him to speak at all," Demba stated. "I am doomed, accept my fate. I am a soldier, too—have been a soldier for five years and some months. As a man, I know no life save that of a soldier. I hate useless words. As you do, Colonel; as the gentlemen of the court hate them. My case is settled; you have decided to sentence me to death. That is well. Nothing more need be said about me.

"But after I am gone, there shall remain others. To those I have a duty, both as a soldier and as a Senegalese. These men you take from their towns, from their villages; you train them for a few months, a few years. They are taught right from left, taught formations, and taught words.

"They are taught that all men are born free and equal. That France stands for justice. That worthy men live for liberty and justice. And that without liberty and justice, there is nothing in life.

"The witnesses have not lied. I have been judged according to their words. I did admit that the spilling of blood called for the spilling of blood. The witnesses were believed when their statements were prejudicial to me, disbelieved when they stated that I was tricked away from the scene of the murders. That is right, for all men believe what they wish to believe.

"I state now that it was just to kill Lieutenant Charlier and the sergeants. Representing France among us, who fought for France, they stole our food. They were unjust, they were mean, they were unfair. We believed what was taught us, that liberty and justice were worth dying for.

"Not many years ago the French called us and said, 'We are attacked; come and help us.' Thousands of us volunteered, thousands more went into the army without resistance. Thousands died, thousands were crippled. The white men who fought against you termed us savages. We were; we are. We are simple folk, who react to the beat of the tomtoms. When the tomtoms say dance, we dance. When the tomtoms say love, we love. When they say fight, we fight. When they say die, we die.

"We asked no questions. But explanations were always in order. Men were sent to explain, I know, for I was one of them. We were given no tomtoms made of wood and skin, but tomtoms made of words, justice, liberty, civiliza-

tion. They were tomtoms that made no sound of themselves. But we were taught that certain reactions were expected of us when we heard them. And we grew to believe that.

"We returned, eager to go back to towns and villages, some to till the fields, some to enter the trading stores, some to fish, some to gather products of the forests. And we were cooped up like animals, denied hope and, for the first time in years, denied explanations. Why did we want explanations? Because we had grown accustomed to explanations.

"We wanted to know why we had been heroes in France, and became bushmen again in Africa. Why what we had done was noble, and we were treated like convicts.

"We wanted to know why rice and dried fish were enough for us, why officers should profit from the unsatisfied cravings you had taught our stomachs. When we were in France, we were given tobacco, beef, jam, and many other things. We learned to like them, to need them. To deprive us of them when we still were soldiers in uniform was unjust. We were not treated like men.

"It was as if tomtoms were saying, 'No liberty, no justice, therefore you must fight for them.' In two hundred more years, you can teach us that your tomtoms are to be used on certain occasions only, and not at all times. We do not yet know that. When our tomtoms beat and say one thing, that thing must be done. We thought it was the same with the new tomtoms.

"It is nothing that I should die after so many. I have seen many dead men, of all kinds. Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, white, black and yellow men. Men are needed to die that others may learn. By my blood, and by my heart, I am fitted to be one of those who die."

Demba looked at the judges, and his blood pounded in his veins with a joyous rhythm. He did not derive the certainty of acquittal from reason but from instinct. Sometime during the few minutes he had spoken, the atmosphere had changed. He would live, he would be freed. They understood. Now, not merely the audience but the judges were on his side. He had beaten the word tomtoms to good effect.

Aware that he could sit down and rest his case, that the future was once more open before him, he could not resist the impulse to round out his speech. For the soldier who had won must help the politician who would carry on. He raised his hand to still the rumor of applause, and concluded.

"The prosecutor has asked for my head. Here it is. When I was seventeen, I enlisted to fight for France. France has the disposal of my life. Her enemies failed to kill me—not through my fault, behold—" Demba opened his tunic, revealed his scars. "Bullets, steel, shells—and gas in my lungs which I feel at times. My life is France's. If she wants it now, it is hers as it was yesterday. Monsieur the prosecutor, you have asked for my head. Here it is!

"But teach your tomtoms not to lie!"

THE CRUISE OF THE *Mary & Susan*

By BILL ADAMS

BESIDE me lies a dog-eared ledger, the time yellowed pages of which are covered with faded writing. It is the log book of the bark *Mary & Susan,* out of New Bedford on a whaling cruise. Across the top of the first two pages is written in a large hand: "August 30, 1864. Bark *Mary & Susan* bound to the Western Islands."

The first day's entry reads—

"Got under way and having headwind beat out of the harbor."

Though scores of whalers were sunk by Confederate raiders, there is, in all the log, but one brief reference to the Civil War.

For the second day the log reads:

"We left the Pilot just at dusk stearing S.W. The wind blew quite strong during the night and in the morning we saw some Porpus." For next day, "Passed a schonner bound for Bermuder as we supposed—lowered the boats for blackfish but got none." On the following day a boat is lowered to pick up two bales of cotton, and entry for the succeeding day gives that one brief hint of the Civil War. "Saw a steamer which we supposed to be a Pirot but proved to be a blockade runner." The cotton was doubtless from a sunken blockade runner.

Days pass with no entries save brief reports of the weather, till on the sixteenth day a boat is lowered to "pick up a piece of plank." This, like the incident of the cotton, is illuminating. It shows the difference between the ways of a

whaler and those of a hurrying merchantman. But a better example of the lack of hurry in a whaler comes when the *Mary & Susan,* seventeen days out, meets the whaler *Roscoe.* Each ship lowers her boats, and captains, officers and crews visit. The *Roscoe* is bound home with 2000 barrels of oil below.

Twenty days out, the skipper goes ashore at the Azores, and the log reports—

"Lost one man named Joe that went ashore and another named Peter was put in jail."

Of why Joe deserted, or Peter was jailed, there is no mention. On this day a hundred bushels of potatoes were brought aboard, and ten thousand onions. Also eight new men are obtained to fill out the crew.

When thirty days out from home, the bark starts south; but is no sooner under sail than the skipper changes his mind and puts back "to get some eggs." Imagine a clipper captain putting back for eggs, or anything else, once he has taken his ship to sea! Eggs are obtained. The bark sails.

"Broak out the slop chest and distributed some close to the men got from the islands," reads the log.

With the ship at sea, all hands are "emploied at pickerling onions." But ten thousand were evidently too many to pickle, for after one day at it they are "emploied at making onion nets." This day the skipper visits the *Star of the West,* a merchantman with coals for "Cokimbow." The wind is very light, otherwise the *Star of the West* would not be stopping to oblige the whaler anxious for news.

On the fortieth day from New Bedford, "Lowered the boats for the men to practise pulling;" and two days later the *Mary & Susan* draws her first blood.

"Lowered the boats to chase blackfish and got three small ones." Then for three weeks the crew are "emploied at sundry jobs," at anything to keep them from idleness. It would seem that there are no whales in the Atlantic. Only blackfish have been seen, and the blackfish is a poor prize. But at last, on November 8th, the log reads—

"Raised a large school of spearm whales and chased without success." Next day again. "Just before daylight run over a large school of spearm whales, lowered the boats, saw the whales once more, then lost all run of them."

At the end of November "what we supposed to be the coast of Patigonia" is in sight. On this day a sea breaks over the stern and smashes the cabin skylight. Though it must have been a terrific sea, the skipper gives it only the briefest mention. On December 7th he takes his ship through Le Maire Strait and heads for the Horn.

South of the Horn comes a log entry that amazes a clipper sailor. The whaler's boats are taken on deck and painted! What sort of paint would it be that the whaleman used down there? Ours was all stowed away long ere we came near the Horn. The day after they are painted the log reports "A strong gale and very heavy sea." A boat left on a clipper's deck would have been smashed to matchwood in no time at all.

On December 20th the *Mary & Susan* has the coast of Socoroa in sight to the westward. You will not find Socoroa on a modern atlas. It is that part of the South American coast including the Chonos Archipelago and the lower coasts of Chile. Now across the top of the log book's pages are written the words "Cruising off Socoroa". She has reached her first whale ground. This day she falls in with the *Islander,* thirty-one months out of New Bedford, with 2500 barrels of oil below. Sulphur bottom whales are seen, but too far away to chase. In the evening she meets the *Cleone,* seven months out, with 370 barrels. On Christmas Eve the *William Gifford* is spoken, thirteen months out, with 380 barrels.

Early Christmas morning she meets the *Sappho,* fourteen months out, with 1000 barrels. All down the Atlantic she

has seen no other whaler. Now we begin to get an idea of the magnitude of the American whaling industry, for Socoroa is but one cruising ground of many.

Early Christmas morning the boats are lowered to chase blackfish and, after a long, hard pull, return with none. "Opened a barrel of salt pork and a barrel of hardtack." Such the Christmas of the *Mary & Susan.*

On New Year's Day, in a strong south gale, the boats chase humpback without success. Toward evening the wind falls and they visit the *Islander* and *Sappho* for a gam.

It is now Summer in the southern ocean; but Summer is bleak at best, and gales are frequent. Sails are constantly split and must be sent down for repair. Not till January 3rd does the *Mary & Susan* take her first whale. The *Sappho* nearby succeeds in taking one from the same school.

In a light wind and heavy rain the boats' crews tow the dead whales three miles to their ships. During the next week the *Mary & Susan* lowers her boats seven times without success. Sometimes the *Islander* is seen cutting in a whale, sometimes the *Sappho.* The *Gypsy* and *Benjamin Cummings* are met with, and the *Cleone* and *William Gifford* again.

Fog hides gray, sullen seas at times, and often rain.

"Emploied at sundry jobs."

The crew tightens slack rigging, mends sails, repairs boats, till on February 25th comes an entry that seems almost ridiculous, so little does it seem in keeping with the whaleman's regular business:

"First part of this day a strong wind and heavy sea—lowered a boat and went ashore on Socoroa for strawberries." Late in the day the sailors row their skipper back, "With a strong gale blowing and a very heavy sea." Whether strawberries were found is not stated. Two days later the boats chase a large sperm whale without success.

BY March 1st the bark is six months out and has taken only a few blackfish and one humpback. But luck turns.

"First part of these twenty-four hours saw a large spearm whale, lowered the boats and the third mate struck. After he turned up they hooked on to him and towed him all night. Sent the fourth mate to help them tow."

It must have been a big whale, for not till five days later are they stowing the oil in the hold. A week later—

"At 6 A.M. raised a large boddy of spearm whales, lowered the boats and the first and third mates struck, but the third's line parted." In a strong wind and fresh sea the mate's whale is brought alongside. They are still cutting it in when, "Raised a large boddy of spearm whales, lowered the boats and the mate's boat struck." While all hands are at work on the whales, "A heavy gale from N W and very rugged."

Two weeks of strong gales and high seas pass before boats are lowered again, for "a large boddy of spearm whales." Says the log, "The third mate's boat soon came aboard stoven." Whether the whale stove the boat by a blow of his tail, or bit it in two, is not stated. Nor is there mention of injury to the crew. The first and second mate each take a whale, and so does the skipper of the *Islander.* "Mated with the *Islander*" says the log.

In books on whaling one reads of constant great jealousy among whalemen. There is no evidence of it in the *Mary & Susan's* log. On the contrary, she often mates with another vessel. The *Islander* being far upwind, all the whales are taken to the *Mary & Susan.* During the five days that the crew is busy on the three whales, the ships drift apart in heavy weather. Then the weather moderates and the *Mary & Susan* heads toward her partner. A sudden squall splits three of her sails. The gale is back, full force. Not for two weeks is she able to deliver to the *Islander* her share of the oil.

A little more than seven months from home, the *Mary & Susan* is towed by her boats into Talcahuano Bay. There she hauls alongside the *Oriola* and puts aboard that vessel, to be taken home, what little oil she has. On this day Henry Cleaveland, a sailor, is missing. He has fallen overboard unseen. Next day three boats go ashore for potatoes and beans.

"This day Charles A. Jones ran away a Dutchman." Three days after Jones the Dutchman deserts, "Joe King, Jackman Antone, and Josea Silvara run away today."

No reason is given for their desertion.

Having obtained two men to take the places of the five lost, the bark goes to sea and heads for the "offshore grounds," bound north. On May 16th the skipper goes ashore in the Chincha Islands, apparently to stretch his legs. At sea next day he quarrels with and disrates the steward, a sailor taking the latter's place in the cabin. In a spell of calm weather the boats are lowered and all hands give the outside of the ship a coat of paint. On Friday, May 26th, the bark is running along the shore of Chatham Island, in the Galapagos group. Two days later she drops anchor off Albemarle and "Sent all hands ashore for terpin." After a week four boatloads of "terpin" have been obtained and she proceeds to the offshore grounds, meeting, as she sets sail, the *Hecla* and *Platiny,* one with 750 and the other with 500 barrels of oil; both twenty months out. Instead of salt pork the crew now feast upon "terpin"—the whaler's name for the great turtle of the Galapagos.

In the middle of June, no whale having been taken since she left Talcahuano, the bark is on the offshore grounds, in longitude a hundred degrees west, and on the equator. The *Sappho* is sighted, and reports having taken no whale since leaving Socoroa.

On June 25th the boats are lowered for blackfish. They are still away when, "Raised a large white water and called the boats aboard, kept off for the white water which proved to be a big spearm whale."

The *Mary & Susan* and *Sappho* mate for the chase, and the second mate of the latter strikes. It is the first whale taken since March, by either vessel. The *Sappho* cuts it in and later gives the *Mary & Susan* her share of the oil. A week later the first, third, and fourth mates of the *Mary & Susan* each strike a sperm. The mate's is brought to the ship, but the other two escape and "go fast to windward." After an all-day chase under the equatorial sun the boats return and all hands go to work on the mate's whale.

For Sunday, July 9th, the log reads, "Latitude 4 south, longitude 110 west, begins with light trades heading to the westward. Fine weather. Finished boiling the mate's whale. Middle part fresh winds. Heading to the eastward. At half past six o'clock raised a large school of spearm whales all got breakfast then lowered away and the first and fourth mates struck. At 10 A.M. took the whales alongside. The other boats continued the chase."

Late in the day the boats return, the whales having gone "fast to windward". The rest of Sunday and the three days following are spent in cutting in the whales. Then for thirty-three days all hands are "emploied in the rigging".

At 5 P.M. on a Saturday, the ships being on the equator, all the boats go after sperm whales and return empty handed late in the night. At six next morning the whales are seen again, and away go the boats. The first, second and third mates each take a whale. Sunday is a day of hard labor in terrific heat. The three following days are alike; and alike aboard the *Sappho* too, for she has taken three whales from the same school. On Thursday the *Mary & Susan* takes three more. On Friday she takes two. Having more than she can handle in the intense heat, she gives one to the *Sappho*. As soon as the whales are finished with, "a new barrel of molasses is opened and shared out to the men."

A week later the *Sappho* is sighted with her boats down and the *Mary & Susan* makes all speed to join in the chase. Late in the evening the mate strikes a cow and a calf.

"The iron drawed from the cow and the calf not being worth keeping, the mate cut the line."

Now the whaler heads for the Marquesas, and on August 27th meets the ship *Memphis,* with five hundred Chinese coolies for the Chinchas, under contract to work in the guano.

When a year and seven days out from New Bedford, the *Mary & Susan* anchors off Rohuga. Her boats bring off fresh water, four loads of plantains, coconuts, seven hogs and four hens. Next day they bring seven hogs more, another load of coconuts and more fresh water. Fourteen hogs would seem a large supply, but the Marquesas hog is but a puny beast. The ship proceeds to Magdalena and the skipper goes ashore to trade with the natives. Six casks of water, great quantities of coconuts, bananas, plantains and sweet potatoes are obtained; and the ship proceeds.

Eleven days later Pitcairn Island is sighted. The skipper goes ashore and sends off five hundred oranges, seven barrels of sweet potatoes and some pumpkins. Next day he sends two thousand five hundred oranges and more sweet potatoes. The ship steers south, sees right whales for the first time and lowers the boats. The first, second and third mates strike. The mate's whale escapes with the line, the third mate's sinks, and only that killed by the second is brought to the ship. While all hands are busy cutting it in the school is seen again, and away go the boats for a long, vain chase.

"Broak out a new cask of molasses this day and served it out to the men."

ON HER second Christmas at sea, no whales having been seen in five weeks, the boats go ashore on Socoroa for sand to scrub the decks, and wood for the cook. That evening the *Sappho* is seen with her colors flying, signifying that her boats are down; and the *Mary & Susan* sends hers to join in. No success. And during the next three weeks the boats are lowered seven times with no success. On January 25th the *John Wells* is spoken, with 70 barrels, and on the next day, in a heavy gale, the *Cleone, Rainbow* and *Sappho.* The latter reports having taken a sperm that yielded 70 barrels. Two weeks later the second mate strikes a whale and tows it for six hours in a rough sea. On this day the fourth mate is ordered below for insubordination, and "A new barrel of molasses is opened and shared out to the men."

Eight days later the *Courser* is seen cutting in a whale, and the *Cleone* with her boats down. The *Mary & Susan* joins in the chase and the *Sappho* comes up and takes part also. Of twelve boats chasing, only that of the *Sappho's* mate strikes; and "the shank of his iron parts and it gets away." One of the *Mary & Susan's* boats goes to the *Sappho* for a supply of hardtack, her own being all gone. A week passes, with incessant gales. The *Tamerlaine* and *Thomas Dickerson* are spoken, both seven months out; one with 200, the other with 190 barrels.

On March 1st the *Mary & Susan* and *Sappho* mate in a long, fruitless chase of sperm. Next day the second and third mates of the former each take one. Before the whales are cut in the *Mars* is seen with boats down. Work stops, and away go the boats. The mate strikes a large sperm. As soon as it and the others are disposed of, "Opened a new barrel of molasses and served it out to the men."

At the end of March the boats tow the *Mary & Susan* into Talcahuano Bay again. Part of the oil is brought on deck to be sent home in the *Celeste.* The fourth mate is discharged and a new one engaged. All hands are set to scrubbing the grass from the outside of the ship. While they are at it, Tom

Williams, a sailor, deserts. The inside of the ship is washed, the outside painted. After a month spent in repairing rigging, flour, wood, water and seven barrels of onions for "pickerling" are brought aboard. Two new men are obtained, and the boats tow her to sea.

While she heads north the crew is "emploied at painting the inside of the ship." In two weeks she stops at the Chinchas long enough to be given a coat of paint on the outside. Twelve days after leaving the Chinchas she anchors at Albemarle, and half the crew goes ashore in what proves to be a vain search for "terpin."

As early as 1866 the visits of the whalers are threatening to exterminate the great Galapagos turtle.

With the crew busy in the rigging, the whaler heads away for the offshore grounds. On June 26th the first whale is taken since the beginning of March. In two full months not a boat has been lowered. While the men are at work on the whale, a large school is seen, and away go the boats, to take a large and a small sperm. Before the three whales are cut in another school appears, and four more are taken; each yielding 35 barrels. In a high wind and rough sea the rope holding one of the whales parts and it drifts away. Two boats have to be lowered to bring it back.

A couple of weeks go by, with the ship cruising offshore, and the Italian bark *Catalina* is spoken, bound for San Francisco. The *Mary & Susan* puts letters aboard her. Next day the second mate takes a 70-barrel sperm and the other boats chase from 9 A.M. till 4 P.M. without success. The ship is on the equator, the heat intense. Next day the mate brings a large sperm to the ship and the other boats chase all day and far into the night without success. Then the tired crew goes to work, to cut in the whales before they become too rotten. Letters are put aboard a French bark from Bordeaux to San Francisco. The English brig *Crown* is met with, short of water and in dire straits. The *Mary & Susan* spares her water.

On August 30th, the ship now just two years out from home, the boats are lowered and all hands scrub the grass from her sides. At the end of September, no whales having been seen meantime, she anchors at Magdalena again. Great quantities of fruit are obtained, and a number of hogs. Having filled up with fresh water and thrown overboard a number of barrels "of stinking pork" she heads south. In two weeks she is at Pitcairn; the captain goes ashore and, having sent off sweet potatoes and fruit, remains ashore overnight. "The captain not feeling very well."

For Saturday, November 10th, the log is written up by the captain's son.

"Begins with light breezes from N E steering S E. Middle part the same. At twelve midnight father called the mate who gave him a dose of castor oil. He still complained of his head aching very bad. At half past six I went to call him for breakfast and couldn't wake him. It seemed as if there was something in his throat for he would ketch his breath several times and then take one long breath. The officers took him and sat him on the sofa in the cabin, and after that he seemed to breathe easier. We gave him an injection that brought away a good deal. At 9 A.M. his pulse beat so litely that you could scarcely perceive it. They then laid him on the bed and at 11 A.M, he breathed his last, dying without a struggle, not having spoken a word since calling the mate at midnight. Having nothing on board to preserve the body, we tacked ship and steered for Pitcairn Island, there to bury him."

Next day a coffin is made and "the corse laid in it". Next day, "The corse beginning to smell we said a prayer and nailed the lid on." Three days later, "The corse came ashore at 10 A.M. and Simeon Young a native performed the burial service."

On the first Sunday after leaving Pitcairn the crew are "emploied at making ropeyarns out of an old hawser." On December 11th the bark *Sea Ranger* is

sighted, with 226 barrels of oil; and the *Mars,* with 700. Socoroa is in sight this day, and no whale has been taken since the latter part of July. Christmas passes with no mention. New Year starts thick and foggy. The *Cleone* and *Contest* are spoken, the former reporting that she has just taken a 75-barrel sperm. Ten days later, in a fresh gale and high sea, the mate takes a whale. The *Cleone* takes one also, from the same school, and later a second that yields 100 barrels. The whalers *Hamilton, Niger, George Howland* and *Rousseau* are spoken. *The Niger,* on her way to Talcahuano, takes the *Mary & Susan's* cook aboard, "he being very sick." On February 24th the *Mary & Susan* and *Rousseau* send all their boats in chase of sperm and, having had a twelve-mile row for nothing, the boats return late in the night in very rough weather.

The *Petrel* furnishes the *Mary & Susan* with twine, sugar and butter the next day; and in the evening the *Mary & Susan* and *Amy* mate to chase sperm. A heavy gale springs up while the boats are away, but the *Mary & Susan's* mate takes a large whale and tows it three miles to the ship. For two days it lies alongside.

Then the wind moderates somewhat and, "Undertook to cut in the whale but found it too rough." For another day the whale lies alongside. Then as the wind goes down all hands start work on it. But it explodes and showers the ship with stinking flesh. A week later the *Mary & Susan* and *Sappho* mate, and a large sperm taken by the latter's mate is brought to the *Mary & Susan.* A strong gale springs up. The coast of Socoroa is twenty miles distant. Being afraid of getting driven ashore, they cut the whale adrift and let it go.

"Antone Marea, a man forward, is very sick so we will have to put in," reads the log. The ship heads for Talcahuano. "Antone Marea seems to be going." And that is the last mention of the dying sailor.

FOR thirty days the whaler lies at anchor while they scrub the grass from her sides, give her two coats of paint outside and overhaul boats and rigging. Then, on April 24th, she is towed to sea by her boats and sets sail for Cape Horn. In two weeks she is south of the Horn, in very thick weather, with a strong gale and torrents of cold rain. On May 18th she ceases to steer to the eastward, and across the top of the log's pages is written in big, triumphant letters, "Bark *Mary & Susan* bound North that is Home."

The South Atlantic seas roll gray and sullen, but on May 24th the weather clears and all hands start to clean ship for home. While they are down on their knees, scouring the decks, a "strong gale springs up from dead ahead and sail must be taken in in a hurry. While the hands were shortening sail this day Manuel Parez, a forecastle sailor, fell overboard and not being able to swim sank at once."

Lowered with the swift skill of the whaler, a boat was too late to save Manuel Parez—the island Portugee upon his glad way home.

Weekday and Sunday, all the long way up the Atlantic, the crew is kept at work cleaning ship. Only once are whales seen, and then work stops instantly and away go the boats—on a long, hard chase upwind, without success.

The men of the hurrying merchant clippers scorned whalers, looking down on them as dirty old tubs altogether lacking in smartness. But so thorough is the cleanup aboard the *Mary & Susan* now that not only are her decks scraped, but her topgallant and royal yards and masts are sent down on deck to be planed. On a calm day the boats are lowered and all hands give her a hasty coat of paint outside. Her rigging is well tarred, and shines in the sun. Her boats are taken on deck and painted. She glistens from stem to stern. She reeks to high heaven, of course, and

that is unavoidable; since in her holds are some thousands of barrels of oil, many of which were obtained from carcasses well along toward putrefaction.

The tools of her bloody trade are polished and laid away; harpoon, lance, cutting spade. Only on her main deck there still stands the try works in which so many tons of whale blubber have been tried out. Now it too can be dismantled, and thrown to the sea. It is June 27th, and she is only four hundred miles from New Bedford. Since she rounded Cape Horn she has seen no other vessel. No whale has been taken. The Atlantic is empty of whales.

"Emploied at sundry jobs," the *Mary & Susan's* people are giving her the last finishing touches. They are counting up what money will be theirs when now in a very short time comes the reckoning. You may know that they are saying—

"No more whaling for me! I'm done!"

You can know that they are eagerly waiting the mate's order, and that the mate is waiting to give it:

"All right, boys! Over the side with the try works now!"

The labors of her oarsmen, her boatheaders and her harpooners are over at last!

For June 27th the log entry reads, "At 2:30 P.M. raised a large school of spearm whales, lowered the boats and the mate and second mate each got two. Took them alongside at half past two and commenced cutting in."

Twelve hours' hard pulling from the time the boats were lowered till the four dead whales were brought alongside! And then four days' hard toil at cutting in!

Once more the *Mary & Susan* is blood reddened and greasy from rail to rail, from forecastle head to poop. Once more the smoke of the try works soots her from bow to stern. But throughout the voyage there has been no more successful kill, so what matter? With many a jest, her people gladly add a few more dollars to the tally of their awaited pay.

Perhaps, half wakening from his sleep on Pitcairn's lonely isle, her skipper smiles, murmuring, "Good lads! Well done!"

On July 1st, as soon as the four whales are finished with, all boats are lowered for the last time.

"All hands go to work at washing the ship outside."

When that is done, the decks are scraped and scoured from end to end. Masts, spars, boats, bulwarks, deckhouses—all swabbed till soot and blood are gone. But the boats are cleaned upon their outsides only. To polish them inside is not possible now. Since there is nowhere else to stow the last of the whale oil, it must be stowed in them. The *Mary & Susan* is coming home a "full ship".

For Thursday, July 4th, 1867, the log entry reads—

"Begins with strong breezes from S W steering E N E. At 4 P.M. keep off N E. At 4:30 P.M. entered Buzzards Bay."

The voyage is done. Hail to the New Bedford whaler!

A Story of Medieval Italy

OF PROPHECY

By F. R. BUCKLEY

To Hymetton of Egypt, the Astrologer, at the Sign of the Lamb Crowned with Stars, in Padua, these, from Luigi Caradosso the old soldier:

HEAVENLY sir:

Your letter hath mystified me, in that I know no more of stars than can be learned from sleeping under them, and you write as though I had been born with a comet in my mouth. Nor can I fathom how an Egyptian with a Greek name may be own brother to Gianetta Spiro of Verona; unless you come from Egypt like as all swordsmiths used to come from Ferrara.

Finally, though I can see how you might benefit in the eyes of this lord of yours, could he be shown that astrology had proved itself potent in the case of another prince, curse me if I see how this history of Michele Porro, which you demand of me, shall advantage you; rather the reverse. Nevertheless, for the sake of your sister, I will write it. She gave me a pair of hose after the rout of Mugello, and aught I can do for her

brother is to be done, rheumaticks or no rheumaticks.

It is a strange thing for to think, eh, how long humans can do without knowing their latter ends, as by your trade; or being brought to 'em, as by mine; and how short a time they can live without breeches! I assure you that from the time that pike caught me by the waistband, until Gianetta (God rest her!) lent me those hose of her husband's, I was no longer a captain of horse, but a cringing worm. Aye, I have been dressed in gilt plate; I have made the earth shake; but since then I have touched my helmet to tailors.

But regarding this Porro and his dealings with the stars (wherein methinks you will find nothing but confusion) I would tell you that I was not in his service. I was captain of the guard to Guglielmo II, Duke of Rometia, whose soul God receive, but who had the habit, in peace times, of sending me forth on hire to other princes. Not to fight, unless they hired our whole army; but to inspect defenses, reorganize troops and such-like. A dull business, especially in the hill counties—all rocks and olive trees and the women bundled up like meal sacks. Whereof Porro, his county was eminently one; perched amid mountains where there was ever a cold wind; measuring more up and down than it did across; but mightily well administered for all that.

Aye, it was visible from his very borders that this Porro was none of your ordinary hill nobles who sit ragged with four hostlers for establishment and boast how Charlemagne was their fore-fore-father. The roads were damnable, but they had been cleared of stones so that a horse could pass without breaking a leg; and in a landscape that looked as though it must be scaled with ladders, behold vineyards terraced out of the precipices and bearing very well.

Yes, said my guide, and in another part of the county there was wheat, grown in the same fashion; all his present lordship's doing, for which (famine having latterly abstained from the neighborhood) his subjects were far from grateful.

He had made them build the stone walls for those terraces, and with little wicker baskets carry up valley soil to fill them. Not a man in the county but his back ached; and for good measure this Porro (giving them the vineyards) had made them rebuild his castle that was fallen to ruin.

"Which may he live to enjoy, amen," says my guide sulkily. "But there are folk in these hills who have knives and like him not. Our fathers lived to ripe old ages without vineyards."

"By shortening the lives of travelers they met on the roads," says I. "Doubtless that's a trade his Grace hath wofully oppressed?"

The guide said nothing. I learned later that he had two brothers and an uncle, bandits who had been hanged; and his own face was not one to take kindly to farming.

"Wherefore his Grace is to be murdered, one day or the next?" I asked; to which Cross-eye replied that God knew, but here was the castle.

And there, to be sure, it was; small, but a very neat, soldier-like piece of work; in whose great hall his Lordship was at that very moment in converse with whom, O Hymetton of Egypt? With an astrologer like thyself save that he came (in past lives) from Babylon and Ur of the Chaldees instead of from Egypt.

I remember that, because I could not help but laugh; and his Lordship laughed with me. A very pleasant man he seemed, sitting with one leg over the arm of his chair.

"Under your Grace's favor," says the astrologer, "this is no matter for merriment. From time beyond mind, the everlasting stars—"

"Aye, aye. Hast said that before, man. But proceed," says his Lordship. "Say abracadabra, and tell me what shall be next year's yield of wine, and whether the Florentines will lend me money."

WHICH he did, though not by saying abracadabra. No, first a small boy of his company drew on the flagstones a figure like a wheel; between whose spokes, after much thought and minute inquiry as to the time of his Grace's birth, the soothsayer distributed metal counters. He had a great book with him also, and I mind me that a gold counter represented the sun. He had suns all over his garments, too; suns and moons and things like arrows, embroidered into the velvet of his long red robe.

"I trust his Grace of Rometia is well?" says his Lordship to me, smiling.

He had a pleasant smile, though the jut of his brows over black eyes, and the set of his mouth and jaw warned sufficiently against presumption. I judged him to be thirty or so; he was tall, and of quick motion, especially as to the hands. For farming, it appeared, he had an insatiable passion. Scarce had I answered him as to my lord of Rometia his health, than he was at me to describe some wheel for lifting water out of rivers and putting it on dry lands; a matter further from my comprehension than those stars whereover the astrologer was now brooding with the air of one who finds something very ill to his taste.

"Well?" asks his Grace. "Come, Babylonian! Crop, or no crop?"

The soothsayer started in his skin.

"The—the—crop will be good."

"And the money from Florence?"

"The money, Highness?"

"I asked thee before," says his Lordship, clapping his hands. "Will Florence lend me the money, or not?"

The astrologer peered at his wheel. He was an old man, with a white beard and a high, calm manner; but now, evidently, he was woundy disturbed in his mind.

"Ah, the money from Florence," says he, absently; adding some talk about the moon being in some house or other, and Jupiter next door; you know the manner of it. "Yes, your Lordship; the loan will be granted and the road will be built."

Suddenly his Grace took his leg from the arm of his chair.

"The road?" says he, in a voice of astonishment. "Who the devil told thee aught about a road?"

The astrologer stood up to his full height.

"Who told me to come at all?" says he in a deep voice. "Sire, the stars—the inexorable stars that ruled over Babylon and over Ur, and shall rule over cities and generations yet to come, until heaven and earth shall pass away. I am no roadside conjurer, but the seventh son of a seventh son, and these two thousand years, in other bodies, a priest of the inner mysteries. Talk we no more of grapes and ducats. The wine shall be good, but thou shalt not drink it; and the road built, but never shall your Grace set foot thereon. I speak of your Lordship's life which is in peril—deadly peril—and that within the year."

It was enough to make a man cross himself, but not on duty. The sentry at the door should not have dropped his pike.

"My life?" says his Lordship, breathless-fashion; and the hair stood up on my head. Then he laughed. "Well, 'tis a good guess that we must all die."

"Within the year," says the astrologer like a man exalted. "And mark you the manner, O my Lord. The peril is from a small assassin; small and striking in secret. Watch for such, if you would not leave your lands lordless and without heir. So say the stars!"

His Lordship laughed again, but not merrily. As for me, I remembered what the guide had said—and indeed most of the hill peasants were small men—and a chill ran down my spine.

"A small assassin, eh?" says Michele Porro. "Small, and an assassin. Very good; I will keep good watch for such."

He was still smiling as he spoke, but now of a sudden he got up from his seat, shivered and wrapped his furred gown about him and, unspeaking, walked to the door of his private cabinet.

"Matteo!" says he, as he was about to

enter. The sentry saluted. "See that Captain Caradosso is taken to the captain of the guard and well entertained. Take the astrologer to the treasurer for his fee. Give him a crown."

"Aye, my Lord."

"Dismissed!"

NOW, I was busy for the next week—teaching sentries to cross themselves without dropping their weapons, for one thing. The guard captain, his nose out of joint, would have nothing to say to me; and his Grace was ever abroad, or closeted with secretaries and such. So I had no news until one day I saw I was served in my quarters not by a steward's boy, but by a tall man.

"Shouldst be in the guard, fellow," says I, scowling at him; to which he answered that he would rather, but it was his Lordship's order that men should take the place of pages. Especially tall men; of whom meseemed I had verily seen many about the castle of late. And I was puzzled until time for the afternoon guard mount; which accomplished, I was about to set-to again wondering, when one of those giants brought word that his Grace would see me.

He was alone in his cabinet. He seemed pale; he smiled not, and he picked at the feather of a pen.

"The guard seems in good order, Captain."

"It is in good order *now*, my Lord," says I, putting in the *now* for that the guard captain had been froward. "If I had a suggestion, it would be more harquebuses. For myself, I hate the stinking things; but times change, and there is no doubt—"

He flung down the pen.

"Hath it not seemed to thee," he demanded, without slightest note of what I had been saying," that there are many small men in the guard? Undersized?"

I replied that I had not marked it.

"They seem puny to me," says his Grace, picking up the pen and tearing at it again. "And I have given orders, Captain, that new men be recruited to replace such as are not my height at least, whom I would have thee train. I write to thy master today, asking thy service for another month."

He looked not up at me; I stared at him open mouthed. What, a menagerie of giants? And I to be in charge of it, God forbid; training man-mountains who would not know their right hands from their lefts? I thought for the instant that his Lordship had gone mad; but in that same moment there flashed into my mind his reason.

Aye, it was that astrologer with his talk of small assassins. Since, I had thought of his prophecy and laughed at it; he could have heard that there was ill will against my lord, and on this based a prediction not to be fulfilled until long after he was paid and gone. As for his knowledge of the new road—gossip could explain that likewise. Yet it was evident that Michele Porro believed as to the small bravo, and was afraid. Hard though the head of any of us, there is aye a crack where unreason may drift in. I myself could never endure red headed women. Nor black cats.

Michele glanced up suddenly. He knew what I was thinking; and moreover he scorned denial, which made me think him a better man than before.

"Yes, Luigi," says he, taking the plucked shaft of the pen and biting it. "I am 'ware of this small assassin. Look you. The money hath come from Florence; and I need but agreement with the Count of Monterosso to build that road. Which shall make this county part of the living world, instead of a lair on a hilltop; and my people well-to-do and happy. 'Tis of them I think. I have made them what they are, out of crag jumping cutthroats with their feet in bandages; and, by God, I will not be cut off before I have made them what they should be."

Oh, he had been up at nights, thinking of all this; his hands trembled, and he spoke more loudly than there was need.

"The ambassador from Monterosso

comes here this afternoon to confer," says he. "The count and I are unfriends, and speak not to each other. That is a man would send me an assassin if he could—and add my lands to his own rack rents. But he shall not! We must receive his ambassador honorably, though. This road must be built. Command thou the guard. Dismissed."

Now I wondered whether, for all his good lordship, Michele was not a coward; never was one such yet whose fear for his hide was not put forth as a concern for others; and that night, at the fearsome dinner for the ambassador, I was sure, God forgive me, that such was indeed the case. For the ambassador was a stranger, whom my lord knew not; moreover a villainous looking man, all pock-marked; and a very dwarf for stature.

He sat of obligation at his Grace's right hand; and Michele was instant with me to be handily behind his chair. Despite the which precaution, my lord watched the fellow as one might watch a coiled snake; ate nothing, and sipped water with one eye ever upon him. I should say that his Grace drank no wine ever; maybe he had taken a vow. Whereas contrarily the ambassador was a toss pot; a barrel; a very cistern. Ere the banquet was half over he was rolling in his seat; and by the end, he was telling stories without ends to them, all illustrating the terrors of his person when aroused.

He was, as I have said, insignificant and hideously ugly; but not, it seemed, on these accounts to be despised. There were those who had made this error, and died without absolution—among them a captain of Milanese horse whom I knew to be alive and well; and a certain Bevilacqua, a great swordsman whom I chanced to have killed myself. So he went on; moreover the room was hot, I had been standing there in full armor for three hours; this rambling drunkenness droned in my ears; and for an instant my attention may have wandered. Indeed, I confess it did. I was thinking of a certain dairymaid by me espied that afternoon; when suddenly there was a crash, and behold my lord and the ambassador from Monterosso fighting like wildcats on the floor under the table.

Aye, and with daggers too, in the which kind of fight it is fatal to pull one man away from the other, because there is the stab at parting; and curse me if we could capture their four hands. The regular guard captain, who had stood behind Michele, was worse than useless; he but got in my way and issued orders contrary to mine; and meantime some one was already wounded—I could not, in the confusion of blood, tell which.

My lord was snarling, and the ambassador was roaring that he would rip him up the middle; and the table was overset and half the candles out, and there was I in the gloom, pawing at a revolving ball of diplomacy that stabbed at me every time I came near.

THERE was but one end for it; I must take the risk. Seizing my lord by the feet, I braced myself and jerked him away to the other side of the hall, then flinging myself bodily upon the ambassador. Who very kindly, at receipt of my breastplate on his chest, gasped and gurgled and turned aside his head and lay still. The breath was out of him, but in God's mercy, only for the time being. He had lost one ear, and was plentifully stabbed, but nowhere deeply. Nor was his Lordship. He was cut in one cheek, and had something of a thrust through the shoulder. His worst ailment was that he desired us to take the ambassador forth and hang him.

"A small assassin!" he kept gasping. "Aye, Monterosso hath sent me a bravo for envoy. The Council of Nobles shall hear of this. Take him out and hang him! Pietro, thou'rt witness. Caradosso, thou saw him make his foolish tale a pretext for drawing his dagger. He was to stab me at my own table. Hang him, I say! We will take order with Monterosso!"

Well, of course there was no hanging to be done; certes the man was an ambassador and no bravo; indeed he was secretary of state at Monterosso. All he had done—Pietro the guard captain told me after, when we had become friends—was to say in one of his maunderings that such an one once said such and such to him, whereon he whipped out his poniard. To witness which lie, he had drunkenly clapped hand to his little ceremonial dagger, and my lord had instantly flown at him. Ah, had we laid finger on the little wretch, the Council of Nobles would have had Pietro's neck and mine; and as it was, there was no question but of a war. Having calmed my lord as much as he could be calmed, and put the ambassador to bed, and made sure that none should leave the castle to bear news to Monterosso before we were ready, Pietro and I sat down perforce and considered what lay before us.

" 'Tis pity your Honor, commanding, hath not more knowledge of the country hereabouts," says the captain, sneering; whereat (though I have fought men for less) in these circumstances I arose and besought his hand in friendship.

"Because though but a visitor here, and against mine own will," says I, "I know Monterosso; and though no Babylonish enchanter, I foresee there will be fell doings presently."

"If I'm to command," says he, " 'twill be no affair of thine!"

"Can thy force fight Monterosso without aid?"

He bit his lip and said that never would Monterosso, or any other, dare invade those mountains; which was true. All the enemy could do, since his lands encircled my lord's, was to cut off all supplies and starve the county into submission. As I told Pietro; begging him to believe me neither a fool nor ill willed.

"So to what are we forced?" I asked him. "Why, to an assault on Monterosso, that hath four times thy force and a walled city. And since you need reenforcements, whose troops shall be hired to join you, do you think? My lord of Rometia's, with me at their head; wherefore prithee, Captain, strike hands heartily and let us work together. We shall have need, for I fear that our Porro is no better than a craven."

"By what signs?" says Pietro, all ready to the defense.

And so I told him about the astrologer, and what had since befallen; and he nodded, and combed his beard with his fingers, and looked woundy doubtful at the end.

"I have myself observed—" says he; and checked himself out of loyalty. "H'm. Well, Captain, God grant 'tis not so. There's no noble knows a deployment from a charge, and if any should furthermore give the men an example of skin saving—though curse me if I believe it of his Grace. Let's have a pot of wine."

Wherein he spoke wisely; both as to the wine and his Lordship's courage. Touching the wine, we drank not one pot but many as we discussed the coming campaign; and parted sworn brothers so that I was sorry when a cannon ball killed him a month thence. And as for his Lordship, he took command of the troops after Pietro's death and never have I seen a man charge with less regard for God, man or devil. I should say, concerning this charging, that what I had foreseen came to pass; Michele hired our Rometians with his road money, and together we went forth against Monterosso. For five weeks we had a very merry time on the flat lands, charging and counter-charging, and not too much of this cursed artillery.

It was my hope to end the campaign there; but no, they were too strong for us. Wherefore the war became what I had prayed it might not—a siege of the city of Monterosso, with outlying skirmishes. I wot not if I have made the matter clear to the astrological mind, but sithee, since Monterosso, that was offended, could not attack the Ser Porro in his eyrie, but could starve him there, we must attack to keep open our route

of supplies. When we did the which, into his city goes my lord count, leaving abroad enough cavalry to harry us; and so commits us to a siege, meantime negotiating for allies who should come to his aid and crush us.

A DISMAL business; in which, as I say, the Lord Michele Porro showed himself very other than the coward I had thought. Once, while I was away to take orders from the duke my master, out comes the enemy full force in a sally; whom, by a maneuver that was little better than self-murder, my craven defeated and drove back within their walls. Then it was he who would lead the party trying to scale the north wall with grapnels; they failed. I visited him thereafter and protested that he was throwing away his life.

"Luigi *mio*," says he, laughing at me, "I have a duty to my people. In the one respect I must not fear to lead them; in the other I must not lose my life uselessly. As for instance by the operations of astrology, with its small assassins."

"Sire—" says I; and told him what I had thought about (saving your presence, O Egyptian!) that mountebank from Ur; but it was useless.

Nay, his Grace had heard and believed; as he sat there drinking his water —even in the field he touched no wine— his brow was furrowed with that prophecy.

"He told me of the new road, that I had mentioned to no living soul," says Michele, "and I believe that the assassin shall kill me, Luigi. But through no neglect of mine. And having done my best for my people, I shall fly up among those said stars with a light heart. Dismissed."

"Not a man in the troops would lay finger on your Lordship now," says I; which was true; and of course no stranger was allowed within a mile of him. "Your Grace's leadership in this business—"

He wagged a hand at me and smiled; and picked up one of his eternal papers.

"Dismissed, good Luigi," says he. "And tomorrow we try to breach that south wall, eh?"

Which we did; but without Michele Porro his aid or supervision. For to be plain and in order with you, master astrologer, the next morning found him very sick of a fever, even as the next evening found me woundy uncomfortable from a crossbow bolt where the shoulder joins the neck. It was a larger bolt than the ordinary, and so placed that I could neither move my right arm nor turn my head; wherefore I must lie in my tent and leave everything to my lieutenant. 'Twas he informed me, the day following, of his Lordship's malady.

"I was to his tent for orders," says this one, "but, Captain, he raveth. He knew me not, and caressed the hand of the physician, saying that he would wed him after the campaign, and that a new road should be built, and the county become a state like unto Florence and Venice."

I tried to sit up.

"A physician—from hereabouts!" I roared. "Fools and generation of blockheads, there will be poison! Send the rogue here!"

"Under favor," says the lieutenant, "this is no rogue, Captain, but a good friar that hath been with us since the siege began, succoring the wounded even in the midst of fighting. He hath a red face and—"

"Curse his red face!" says I. "Send me the villain forthwith!"

So that Fra Sebastiano came, though not at once—the next day—and told me that my lord was dead of his fever. Also he took away the dagger wherewith I tried to slay him; and whenas I had fainted, performed miracles on my shoulder so that at this day it alone, of all my wounds, doth never ache in bad weather. Nay, there was no question that Fra Sebastiano was a godly man and a mighty physician. Moreover a marvelous wine drinker.

"They tell me his Grace drank noth-

ing but water," says he sadly, on the third day. (And now pay attention, O Hymetton of Egypt; for of all this scribbling, here is what thou hast sought.) "Did he drink water hereabouts?"

I told him yes.

"Ah, then," says Fra Sebastiano, shaking his head as he refilled his noggin, "there lay his death."

"In water?"

"My son," says the monk, pot on knee, "it is now thirty years that I have been a physician in these parts—and I am none of your ordinaries, pounding snakes' bones and bandaging folk with the skins of dead dogs. I observe, and I consider, and I dream dreams. Now I have seen other water drinkers, especially during sieges, when there would be no wine, and men would fill their helmets at the streams. And I have seen them die, as latterly I saw his Grace."

He drank deeply.

"And I tell thee that in stream water," says he, leaning forward and tapping me on the stomach with his pot, "soever clear it be, there lurk animals invisible, but fiercer than tigers. Mark me. I observe, and I dream dreams. Which said animals being swallowed with the water and taken into the tender inwards of man, do violently rend him so that he dies. Moreover are they so savage that one of them may do a strong man's business; for saying which, the physicians from Padua and such dunghills mock me and say I am mad. But the day shall come when the truth shall be made manifest. *Magna est veritas, et prævalebit.* Is there more wine?"

It was while contemplating his tenth noggin that he used the words which startled me; which I may have mentioned to your good sister when she gave me the hose; and which must have caused you to demand of me this history.

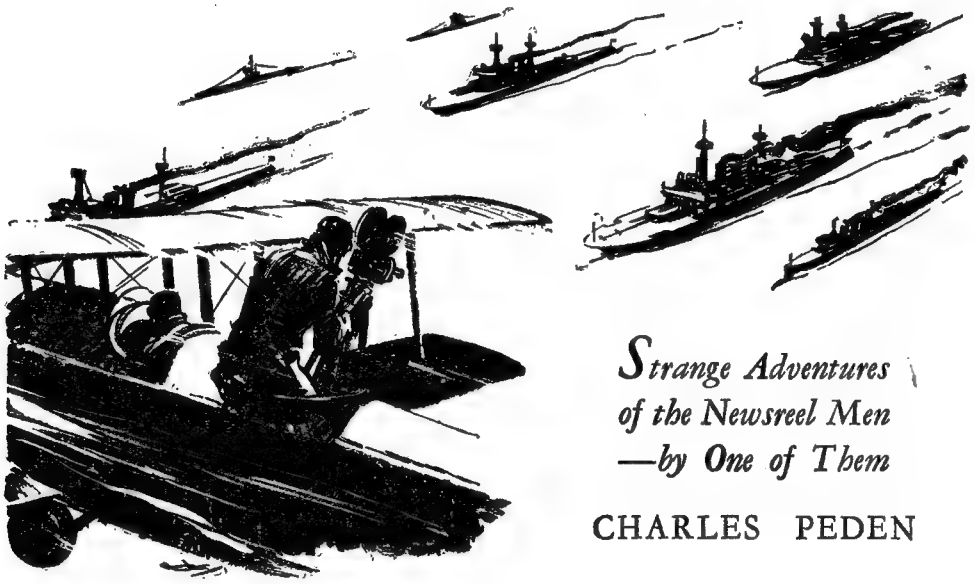
"Aye, water," says Fra Sebastiano. "Clear, innocent and refreshing as thou dost appear; yet verily art thou like unto a fair landscape which yet swarms with *small assassins.*"

So he said; and I am sorry for thine art, O Hymetton of Egypt, but as thou seest there is no help for it here. It was predicted from the stars that Michele Porro should die of a small assassin; whereas, as I have shown, he died of a fever before Monterosso. As for those assassins in the water, those invisible tigers—Fra Sebastiano was at his tenth noggin, and a dreamer of dreams. I laughed at him then; and were not my hand so sore, and I grateful to thy sister, I could laugh at thee now. And all such prophets.

But I refrain; subscribing myself wearily, —L. CARADOSSO, CAPTAIN

Post Scriptum: I was born on St. John's Eve at midnight, in 1511. Should I buy the vineyard from Ercole Pezzaro for xxx crowns, or not?

The KING'S ARMADA



Strange Adventures of the Newsreel Men —by One of Them

CHARLES PEDEN

WE HAD just swooped down to rest at Croydon and were watching a group of tourists engaged in a heated argument with a customs official when I passed a remark to Russ Muth, my companion, concerning the deliberate manner in which the British check incoming packages.

"Yes," he observed, "they certainly take their time about it, and if you hurry them they seem to delight in rubbing it in. I remember back a few years ago when I was all tied up in red tape concerning the shooting of a picture."

"How'd it happen?" I asked.

"It was just after the war. There was going to be a great naval show at Spithead. For the first time since the Armistice had been signed, his Majesty was going to review the fleet. Two hundred warships were scheduled to be in the formation. On advising New York about it, they cabled me to get busy.

"Right from the start I ran up against trouble. Being a newcomer to England at the time, I was not familiar with the way they do things here and, bursting into the Admiralty's offices as I did, only one thing could result. I was told politely but firmly that no pictures could be made of the show.

"Naturally, the edict disturbed me, but New York wanted that picture badly and it was up to me to produce. To do the job from a boat was out of the question, and trying to get anything from a land angle would have been silly. Then an idea struck me. Why not fly? Sprucing up, I hopped a cab and directed the chauffeur to drop me off at the Flying Club, where I felt I would find some one kindly disposed to my idea. I knew quite a few of the boys from war days; they had flown me over the lines on more than one occasion.

"Luck seemed to be with me, for I chanced to bump into a couple of men I'd known for years. They listened po-

litely enough, but declined the honor. They suggested that I forget it and join them in a drink.

" 'It's not being done, old bean.' protested one. 'A chappie can't really fly, as it were, into the very faces of those brass hats, y'know.'

"What you fellows need is a proper appreciation of news value." I argued.

" 'Grant you that, Russ,' conceded the other. 'But this is different. England has always observed a conservative policy concerning such things, and especially so where the royal family is involved. Ask Tracey and myself anything else and we'll be glad to accommodate you. even to putting on an air show; but don't request the other.

"I knew that so far as they were individually concerned, they wouldn't have hesitated to help me out, but the old bugaboo of political disapproval had them stymied. Thanking them, I turned to go, when whom should I meet but an old friend, Sir Alan Cobham! I had covered every major flight he had made from the day he first loomed in the public eye.

" 'Hello Russ!' he greeted. 'What's up? You look sort of crumby. Better have a drink.'

"I told him my trouble.

" 'It is a problem at that, isn't it?' he observed, thoughtfully tugging at the lobe of his ear. 'Tell you what. You toddle out Croydon way tomorrow and look me up. By the way,' he added, with a wink, 'you might bring your camera along.'

"Beginning to see a ray of hope, I thanked him and went back to my hotel in Piccadilly where, under the influence of an optimism inspired by his words, I checked over my camera.

"Ten, the next morning, saw me out at Croydon, and after a short search I located Cobham's hangar, where I found him busily engaged in vetting the rigging of his ship. He relinquished his task to a couple of mechanics and sauntered to one side of the hangar, to forestall eavesdropping.

" 'I'm going to fly you over the fleet, Russ.' He smiled, then assuming a serious expression, he added, 'There is one stipulation.'

" 'And that?' I asked.

" 'To avoid suspicion we will have to keep the camera undercover until we are in the air. Do you think you will be able to set it up while flying?'

"In answer to my nod, Cobham began to arrange things. He first sent the mechanics off on a mission to get them out of the way, then helped me stow my gear aboard. The ship was ideal for picture taking. It was a two-place job with a scarf ring mount attached to the rear cockpit—this is usually meant for machine gun use but is excellent for a camera—the regular streamline cowling had been removed to permit my swinging the camera completely around, and the seat had been detached to give me leg space.

"By the time the two mechanics returned, everything was in readiness. We soared away for Southampton.

"It was no easy job getting the camera set up; the slipstream from the prop hindered me considerably and I had the devil's own time bolting the camera to the mount. It was a good fifteen minutes before I had everything set to my satisfaction. My magazines were set out and within handy reach, extra lenses were beside them, and I was just polishing a couple of K-2 filters when we picked up Southampton. Cobham pulled back his stick and made altitude so that I might have a comprehensive view of the layout.

"Looking down upon the Solent from four thousand feet, every detail of the formation was visible; stretched out in a long line between the mainland and the Isle of Wight was the pride of Great Britain. Every type of vessel was represented, from monster battle wagon to sleek sub-chaser. Their wartime camouflage had been replaced by peacetime gray, and vari-colored bunting flapped from every mast. Never had there been such a display of naval power.

"Seeking out some particular feature to hinge my story on, I spotted his Majesty's yacht, *Victoria & Albert,* by its distinctive double stacks, and definitely checked my judgment upon recognizing the familiar yellow and red standard of sovereignty. Cobham, looking over his shoulder, caught my glance and nodded understandingly. He cut the motor and dived toward the royal yacht, kicking over the rudder slightly as we fell. This swung the wing tip out of my camera's range and gave me a nice field to frame the boat. We slipped in slowly, and I was able to shoot a full magazine before we had to pick up flying speed.

"CATCHING my nod, the pilot set the throttle at a slow cruising speed and we traveled the whole length of the armada out to where the last group was anchored in the Channel proper. Through my finder, as I cranked, I could see the rows of sailors as they stood at rigid attention; every detail of the spick and span ships was revealed to the camera. We figured-eighted and banked around the ships time and again, sometimes dropping to within five hundred feet of them.

"Just to polish off the job, Cobham selected one of the largest battleships for some really close work. He descended almost level with the decks and circled the monster several times. As is with all good things, ours had to end, for on coming perilously close to the masts, I noticed one of the officers studying us with his binoculars. He must have spotted the camera; his agitation was apparent, and the next thing I knew a tiny hydroplane was catapulted from the vessel's deck.

"Cobham noticed the navy plane at the same moment, but being an old hand, he banked off sharply to the right and gave our bus the gun for all she was worth. The pursuing plane followed us for awhile, but gave up the chase when we pushed over the mainland. Sir Alan kept low for awhile, then headed for Avro Field near Southampton.

"My plan had been to ship the negative aboard the *Aquitania,* which was due to sail that very day, but imagine my consternation on seeing the trans-Atlantic liner already in midstream. We landed, and I was about to tell Cobham that I might as well return to Croydon with him, when I noticed that the *Aqui* was not moving. After puzzling for a moment I realized the reason: The passenger ship would have to wait until the royal yacht had completed its cruise of inspection before proceeding to the open sea.

"Letting out a whoop of joy, I bade my pilot a farewell, telling him I would be seeing him later. There was work to do. Down at the end of the stringpiece in front of the Avro plant was a convenient rowboat, and without any more ado I tossed the film into the craft and started pulling for the *Aquitania.* In short order I was alongside demanding a line from a bewildered deck steward. He complied with alacrity at the sight of a pound note, and soon the four magazines of film together with hastily penciled instructions to the purser were being hauled over the side.

"Rowing back to return the handy dinghy, I anxiously watched the liner. Suddenly a jet of steam burst from its siren, and as the sonorous note reached my ears I heaved a sigh of relief. The sight of frothy foam racing aft from the stern further cheered me, for it told me the ship was getting under way and my precious cargo was America bound.

"I reached Waterloo Station, London, about six o'clock, and after filing a cable to my office advising it about the film, I went over to my hotel for an early retirement. The next day would be a busy one collecting up new magazines and getting my camera from Cobham's ship.

"Stepping up to the keys and letters desk of my hostelry, I was struck by the peculiar glance the clerk in charge directed my way.

" 'Oh, Mr. Muth,' she quavered, 'the telephone 'as been a-ringin' somethin'

orful for you this past hour. There's a gentleman as wot call 'imself Mr. Jason and 'e says you are to go right over to Bow Street Station the minute you comes in.'

"'Caught!' I groaned, not giving a thought to the look of horror on the little girl's face as she heard me speak. She must have thought I was guilty of all sorts of murder and mayhem.

"It wasn't but a few minutes before I was in the presence of three stony eyed individuals who presided over the alien's department of the famous police station.

"'Now, Mr. Muth,' began the one who had introduced himself as Jason, 'what have you to say for yourself? You have committed a serious breach of faith, and under the laws of the Empire you may be deported.'

"I realized that the jig was up, so admitted everything. This in itself seemed to appease the officers somewhat, and I was ordered to accompany one of them to New Scotland Yard for further questioning. He was a member of the C.I.D, and as we threaded traffic around Trafalgar Square in the little gray official car he told me how Cobham, upon landing, had been detained and compelled to disclose my whereabouts; they also knew which vessel carried the film.

"There was one thing, however, that I banked upon to get me clear. Namely, the British people's love of fair play. After all, I had not photographed anything of a secret nature; no naval mystery was revealed.

"Down at the Yard I was ushered before several distinguished looking gentlemen, who upon being introduced proved to be members of the Admiralty. They stressed the seriousness of my act and announced that unless the negative was returned undeveloped, a national embargo would be placed upon all of my company's future productions. They had me there. I assured them that the film would be returned, and under the eyes of a censor I composed a cable instructing my office to return the film immediately. This being done, I was permitted to leave.

"True to the terms, the film was returned to England untouched and I turned it over to the naval authorities. The stuff was developed the afternoon of its arrival and I was requested to be present at its screening. That show was going to decide my fate.

"From the looks of the audience composed of bigwigs and brass hats, I began to have visions of Old Bailey, then the walk to the hangman's scaffold. When the picture was projected I held on to my seat. If I do say so myself, it wasn't a bad bit of negative, and stealing a glance at the faces of my judges, I gathered that they were enjoying the show.

"When the lights went up, the officer who headed the Admiralty group called me to his side. He seemed to be having a tough time in his efforts to convey severity. After a few deep throated coughs and growls, he reprimanded me for having taken matters into my own hands. He stated that certain scenes must be deleted, but the film would be returned to me. Needless to say, I was overjoyed at the vindication and no time was lost in reshipping the film to New York. This time through the regular custom's channels, and minus the scenes designated on a slip of paper.

"Deep down in their hearts I think the government officials enjoyed the situation. It had appealed to their sporting instinct. They had been outwitted fairly. From that time on," finished Muth, "I was given every sort of cooperation, and that is why I don't chafe at their apparent deliberation in passing judgment."

"I should say not," I agreed. "They certainly treated you square. But tell me, Russ—what scenes did they order to be omitted?"

"Shush. I'll tell you a secret." Muth grinned. "When I unfolded the note that was given I got the surprise of my life. It referred to a couple of closeups of the English Channel with nary a boat in sight."

Continuing

The DEVIL'S PASSPORT

By GORDON YOUNG

DONALD RICHMOND, known in most of the great cities of the world as Don Everhard, American gambler and adventurer, knew the workings of the police just about as well as he did the underworld—and was more feared than trusted by both factions. However, J. K. James, the Washington undercover man, thought enough of Everhard to call him in on the fight against La Tête de Mort, a notorious international blackmail ring.

Everhard and James checked up on a stock swindle of gigantic proportions, and discovered that it was engineered by the blackmailers—through the medium of one of their operators, a New York stock broker named Wattison. A raid on Wattison's safe yielded invaluable documents, and a passport of the gang: a death's-head ring in which was a perfect miniature of Wattison. When the broker dropped utterly from sight, James sent Everhard to Paris, where the headquarters of the ring were believed to be located.

Forewarned against a treacherous Parisian beauty named Isobel de Nevers, known to be a tool of the gang, and told that a French operative known as Monsieur X would work with him when the time came, Everhard took passage. To allay suspicions of the gang, James arranged it to appear that Everhard was fleeing American police. On the steamer a pretty young woman, who gave her name as Vilette Laramie, made overtures to Everhard, calling his attention to a heavily bearded old man who was never seen without a peculiar looking cushion in his arms. Everhard did not take the girl into his confidence, but did act on her tip. He made it his business to secure the cushion—and discovered

it contained a quarter of a million dollars in bills. He immediately had the old man put in arrest, confronted him with the fortune—and was not surprised when the prisoner confessed he was the missing New York broker, Wattison.

On his arrival in Paris, the French police were frankly suspicious of Everhard, Monsieur Biradou of the Sûreté losing no time in warning him that France would not tolerate American gangster methods . . . Thus assured that the police had not discovered James' ruse, Everhard set about to win the confidence of some member of the gang.

By chance he forestalled an attack on the life of a Prince Hovenden in a sidewalk café, and the prince introduced Everhard at his club, the Horseshoe. There he met Nick Dodalus, a Greek gambler, who invited him to sit in a poker game. Everhard immediately saw he was being framed—and met crooked play with crooked play. Calling for a showdown, he raked in the huge stakes on the table and dismissed, at the point of a gun, all the players with the exception of Dodalus. The Greek was very unhappy.

"Honest, Mr. Richmond, it—it was kind of a joke!"

"Why try to frame me with parlor magic?"

DODALUS' muddled accent became very like a stammer.

"I'd heard about you—heard you was Don Everhard. Somehow you don't look it—didn't till you called the showdown. I was curious—curious to see what you'd do against a bunch like that."

"You and who else?"

"Oh, nobody. Just me." He paled.

"You're a liar."

"Any amount you say, Mr. Richmond."

Everhard's wrist moved slightly. A finger pointed with casual directness at the Greek's face.

"I've watched your play, Dodalus. You're a thoroughbred—at poker. I know damn well you didn't frame me for any share in a six-way split. Who put you up to it?"

"Nobody."

"All right. Then I'll take you and

these cards to the secretary. You'll be kicked out of this club. Be barred from all clubs that bar crooks. So come across, Nick, and I'll never peep. Otherwise—" He began gathering in the cards with deft, loose fingered quickness.

Dodalus puffed, gasping. Sweat glistened like grease on his dark, thick face.

"He didn't mean a thing wrong, Mr. Richmond! He just said, 'Nick, let's find out if this Mr. Richmond is who we think, and see what he can do. You fix it up, Nick. Get some of the Turk's gang up here, on the quiet. Let's see what happens.' So I done that, Mr. Richmond. I'd have paid you back!"

"Who is he?"

"He's really a good friend of yours, Mr. Richmond. But I promised I'd never tell. If you take them cards to the secretary, I'll get kicked out, all right. But I won't tell."

"Are you sure the prince is really a friend of mine, Nick?"

"Lord, don't let 'im know I told!"

"Hell, no." Everhard laughed.

Dodalus took Everhard's hand into both his own to shake it.

Dodalus, like a lonely, faithful dog that has found a good friend, became rather like Everhard's shadow. It distressed him that Everhard would not smoke his rich, especially made cigars, would not touch the fine though rather heavy wines of exclusive lists, would not eat the sort of food that cost a lot, or play with his girl friends. Dodalus had a lot of them, too.

Everhard would not even play poker with him. He was afraid that if Dodalus was bumped repeatedly on some of those big pots that he forced before he would show his cards, there might be a lurking bit of suspicion that something had been slipped over on him.

"Wait till Kurlingen comes back to Paris, Nick. He'll trim you."

"Him? Not him! But he's no fun, though."

Dodalus grunted, eyeing a fresh cigar's glowing tip.

Everhard nodded abstractly, with perfect understanding. Kurlingen was another who splashed money, hopeful that gentlemen would admiringly take notice.

Dodalus had bad table manners and no relatives. But, unlike Kurlingen, he wasn't a rotter. Dodalus had big interests in the Near East tobacco markets, particularly in Egypt. Men bled him—women bled him—beggars bled him. He did not care. He got a great thrill in walking about the streets at night and suddenly shoving franc notes into the fingers of a sad looking working man, broken old woman, or dejected street girl, and watching the amazed glow of delight on a pinched face.

"I want that everybody look happy," he said in his thick accent. "To do that—" he patted his belly—"it is better than a cocktail for a nice warm feeling." Also Dodalus insisted, "I know damn well a fellow like you, he don't go lonesome about Paris at night. You won't like my girls—let me see yours."

EVERHARD, one night wandering into an American bar, run by an Englishman and his French wife on the Rue Pigalle, bought two girls a drink. They were English chorus girls. Everhard, having bought the drink, suggested going to the Monk's Cellar for something to eat. One girl said, "Oh, jolly!" But the other, whose smile was interesting, said "No. They rob you there." That was an odd remark from a maiden on the Rue Pigalle at midnight.

Everhard, inquisitive and suspicious, wondered if it were genuine, and experimented. Nora—though her name was Irish, she was thoroughly English—showed that it was, for she refused champagne, picked out inexpensive dishes and fussed mildly if the tip were excessive. Her companion, Betty, a curly haired brunette, was not actively greedy, but took whatever was offered and said thank you very nicely.

Everhard had got into the way of dropping into the bar after the show because they were amusing, needed at

least one good meal a day, and he knew they had not been planted on him. And it was rather a novelty to see a chorus girl trying to save money for the man who spent it. Of course, if Nora ever got into the front row of the chorus, she might have other ideas. But even that promotion was unlikely since she drank too much—though without showing it—and kept too outlandish hours for her youth and sweet-English-girlhood-look to last very long. Besides, the evenings were wintry, and they went more than half naked in a draft at the theater.

Girl after girl from the chorus went to the hospital with pneumonia and never came back. Nora and Betty each got what amounted to about twelve dollars a week. Naturally they were glad to have somebody to buy drinks that cost about forty cents each.

Everhard made Dodalus put his jewelry out of sight, turned down his limousine and liveried chauffeur, and took him through the rain in a taxi to the Rue Pigalle bar.

The barroom was small, but not crowded. Tables were moved so you could get to the seats against the wall, and were pushed back when you were seated. If you went to the washroom you went down a ladder, and if you were too drunk to climb back you were out of luck—not being supposed to get drunk. There was a piano and a fiddler, and you sang if you felt like it. The bar was not Bohemian, jazzy or classy. It was friendly. The waiter seemed as pleased to serve Vichy as champagne; and your pockets weren't picked.

Dodalus, the spender, bulked uncomfortably on his seat and gazed at Everhard reproachfully, asking in silence, "Where's the fun in this?"

Shortly after eleven o'clock a group of the girls came from the theater, rain splattered and laughing. Two of them glanced about a little hopefully, saw Everhard's gesture and came. Dodalus was introduced. Betty was unimpressed by the fat, greasy man. She said almost at once:

"I have such a headache. Must go home."

"Now ain't that too bad," said Dodalus. "I was just going to ask can't I send for my car and we'll go to the Tohu-Bohu?"

Betty, sipping a poisonous looking drink, murmured:

"I'd love to, but my maid is waiting up. Besides, I think there's a letter for me from the Prince of Wales."

The lingering look in her eye as she turned aside showed that she had marked down Dodalus as a fourflusher; and he, uncomfortably jewelless, seemed to have no way of making her realize that he was really somebody.

Nora, very quiet tonight, eyed Everhard doubtfully and asked—

"Why did you—" She put her hand to her breast, and paper crackled. "It came this morning. I was silly and bought some clothes. Though I really did mean to make you take it back."

"How much?"

"Three thousand francs. No note or anything. Of course you did it?"

"Let me see the envelop."

It was plain, typewritten, addressed to Mlle. Nora Blake.

"Not I, fair maiden. Think of somebody whose face you've slapped. He wants to be forgiven."

"Honest, you didn't? It makes me feel queer not to know. Almost afraid. Yet like a little fool, Betty and I bought new dresses. Only a little left."

Dodalus, bored and impatient, rose against the table, making a passage.

"I'm going to phone for my car!" he said defiantly at Everhard, and hurried out of sight.

Betty, fingering a package of Cravens, lighted another from the one she held, saying—

"Now that he's broken my heart with false promises about the Tohu-Bohu, and left me, shall I kill myself now, or wait till I get some sleep and feel better?"

Everhard put his hand against each, pushing lightly.

"If advice to young girls is what you really want, go scramble into your party clothes. He's phoning for reservations."

Their housekeeping rooms, or rather room, was in the tenement of a narrow street just around the corner, four stories up and at the rear.

When they came down those four gloomy, ill smelling flights of stairs, a chauffeur in grenadier's uniform escorted them under an umbrella from the doorway to a sixteen thousand dollar Italian limousine. Dodalus, feeling more himself now that he had fished all of his jewelry out of his pocket and decorated himself, held a freshly lighted cigar and stood bareheaded in the rain, bowing as if to princesses.

THE Tohu-Bohu was the fashion; and the spendthrifts of gay Paris clustered there. Not just anybody could walk in. The doorman looked you over; a house detective, who played that he was the manager and just happened to be in the entrance hall, looked you over; the cloakroom girls looked you over; one of the real managers looked you over; the head waiter looked you over, and if you weren't known—or were too well known—everybody would be dreadfully sorry, but every table was taken or reserved. In other words, the management insisted upon having reasonable assurance that you would spend money and weren't a jewel thief.

Champagne in a silver bucket waited at Nick Dodalus' table.

Betty's eyes were as wide and bright as big carbuncles. Nora ran the bluff that all this was nothing new in her young life, and took it in with slow, appraising glances.

Everhard drank ginger ale out of a highball tumbler.

The place was crowded. Half the women there had a wolfish look in spite of their cosmetic glaze. When Nora danced they eyed her strong young body, and envied her smile.

Many people, probably hoping that they could join Dodalus' party and get their bills paid, patted him on the shoulder. One or two men Everhard had met before greeted him as Mr. Richmond. Nora lifted her eyes shyly, without reproach. "Jones", spelled with a "G" to be convincing, was the name he had given her. Women with cat eyed, lingering glances wonderingly appraised Betty, flushed of face, in costume jewelry and new gown already slightly spotted.

"Having a good time, Nora?"

"Of course."

She wasn't, of course, being conscious of her humble salary and what it wouldn't buy. A moment later she again mentioned the anonymous money—not happily.

"I might as well spend the rest of it, now."

The waiter spun a twirler in her champagne glass and refilled it from a fresh bottle. She could drink as much as any woman there, and keep her smile. When that went, Nora would be just another girl, wise like the others and better dressed than now.

A fluttering change of tempo ran through the Tohu-Bohu and voices fell. The music went on, but laughter was hushed. Dancers twisted their necks, all looking toward the door. Nora caught at Everhard's arm breathlessly, putting down her glass to point unobtrusively with the other hand.

"Look!"

Hovenden, tall and—with padded shoulders—broad, was there. He seemed corseted, too, or perhaps it was the snug sleekness of the tailor's fit. His pose was consciously aristocratic. His face was half turned as if wanting the ladies to see his profile. They weren't looking at him.

Isobel de Nevers was at his side, and seemed almost as tall as he until you looked carefully. A bizarre creature, that woman. You couldn't have guessed her age unless her face was washed. You could not tell whether the white sheen of her face was powder on fresh young

skin, or shellac that filled in the wrinkles. It was said that no one had ever seen her by sunlight. A creature of the night—but bright lights. She was startling. Her wig of spun gold, plumed with egrets, and the princess-like hauteur of her carriage gave a deceptive height.

An ermine cloak lay far back over her bare shoulders to let you see how erect they were; and the cloak, open in front, let you see the spangled glitter that danced on the colored gauze mesh of her gown. Jewels blazed at her throat and on her breast, on her fingers and, dangling, twinkled from her hidden ears. She, impudent and vivacious on the stage, for which she was not known to have had any training at all, was now proudly aloof, even disdainful, as if among unworthy enemies. She must have felt that every one of the wolf faced women there, and some of the others too, enviously hated her heartlessness and charm that was said to strip men of wealth.

Everhard hoped that she would make a good job of it with Hovenden, but suspected them of being fish of the same flavor. He had the tip from James' six-months-old magazine to go by, and so knew that this woman was something important in the affairs of La Tête de Mort. Her face, shadowed with wisps of the gold wig, was a dead, flat, mask-like white; her lips crimson, but without mussy lines. A steady hand, her own or the maid's, had spread the rouge—red as fresh blood. Looked like it, too. Made you think of men whose veins had been drained. She, being willfully bizarre and fantastic, meant that it should.

Her half veiled, purple lidded eyes, with vague roving, seemed to gleam unseeingly. Everhard knew it was all a pose, and wondered what the devil she was like underneath; yet she must be as she looked, since she chose to look as she did.

Isobel de Nevers stopped and stared as directly at Everhard as if about to shoot. Then with a lift of the purple eyelids her glance flashed at Nora, whose hand lay in Everhard's on the table. The look was so personal that many people also stared at the astonished Nora.

Isobel de Nevers moved her crimson lips, as if something amused her. The smile vanished in a flash of soft words as, with hand out in a slow gesture, she checked Hovenden. She turned her back, but with a lingering glance at Everhard; and the last thing he saw as she faced about was the smile, amused and enigmatic.

Hovenden, posing for the ladies, had not noticed anything, but knew that something was wrong. She was making him take her away. He looked about in puzzled embarrassment, wondering what had happened. He saw Everhard, and bowed quickly, coldly. He refused to see Dodalus, though Dodalus, with Betty, danced almost within arm's length and spoke.

"Nora, confess!" Everhard demanded. "What the devil did you ever steal from her?"

"I don't know—unless it was you!" She laughed, a little excited.

It wasn't to every one that the De Nevers condescended to give a look of challenge.

Nora's eyes lifted inquiringly to his face. She did not ask otherwise. English dancing schools seem to teach that you should never question your gentlemen friends about anything—they would only lie anyhow.

Everhard said—

"Never saw the lady before—except from the gallery."

Many people had noticed the incident. There was whispering. Fingers were pointed. The whole room was curious. Dodalus came back to the table, wiping greasy sweat from his face, and Betty was breathless.

Everhard explained:

"She probably hadn't made Hovenden unhappy yet tonight—and felt it was time for a bubble of prima donna temperament. Picked on me. Else she's

a fortune teller, and knows that Nora will be crowding her out of the spotlight this time next year!"

They at once left the Tohu-Bohu and started the rounds, popping in and out of all sorts of queer little night cafés. They all landed in an upstairs place in the *Halles* about dawn, and had onion soup and champagne for breakfast. Everhard took a chance with fried eggs and coffee—all bad, and let them go back to be warmed over for some one else.

An hour later the girls came a bit unsteadily from the sixteen-thousand-dollar Italian car before the doorway of their tenement, and praised the Lord that there was no matinée this day. Betty took a wrestling hold on Dodalus' neck to bid him farewell. There was a crinkling sound as her hand closed on what he offered; then the sound of rewarding lips.

Nora put out an unsteady hand and smiled drowsily at Everhard. Her tongue was a bit slow and not quite sure, but the smile deepened.

"I don't love you!" She shook her head. "No—nice man, but I don't. That woman would kill me if I did!"

CHAPTER X

VILETTE AGAIN

MADEMOISELLE HOULETTE, bringing fragrant black coffee, held out a letter that had just come by messenger.

Everhard turned the envelop over and sniffed it. Heavy, costly stationery, faintly perfumed. The handwriting was unfamiliar. A woman's. He ripped the envelop and took out a card, embossed with a crest. The note was in English.

> My dear Mr. Richmond: Please come this afternoon at five o'clock—just you and I for tea—unless you wish to bring the charming English girl. You, of course, will not disappoint one who is so anxious to be a friend.

The signature was a temperamental scrawl. He studied it quite awhile before at all convinced that the name was Isobel de Nevers.

"Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Mlle. Houlette stood as attentively as a long legged terrier waiting for you to throw the ball.

"I am sure your cousin, madame the concierge, must know something about Isobel de Nevers. You mind asking her?"

"What is it, please, monsieur would like to know?"

"Does she poison her lovers at tea, pick their pockets and throw them into the Seine to be called suicides? How about this woman?"

Everhard held out the note. The look on his face was much the same as when he watched a man whom he knew had been trying to stack the cards. This Houlette had mysteriously chased off three valets. He felt that she must somehow know something of what it was all about.

Mademoiselle Houlette took the card and stared at it a long time.

"Ah, monsieur, alas! I do not read English."

"That's so. It's an invitation to tea. What am I to do? I have no one to advise me. I am asking you."

"I suggest that monsieur do what he would like to do."

"Bad advice, mademoiselle. I thought maybe you had some intuition. I've got some. It suggests that I stay in bed for a week."

Mademoiselle Houlette's gray eyes laughed at him, but not her lips.

Everhard, not having to sleep off liquor or food, got on with very few hours in bed; and after a long walk he entered the Horseshoe shortly after noon.

A huge bulk of a man rose with ponderous haste from a massive red chair and charged with both hands out, blubbering welcome through thick lips. It was Kurlingen, Charles Birk Kurlingen.

He wasn't of nice people, Kurlingen; and looked it. He had a big belly, a

blunt, thick nose, low forehead and cold, dull eyes. Everhard didn't like the way Kurlingen was known to treat women.

Now he looked baggy around the eyes and jowls; had lost weight. His small eyes were deep in their pouches. His skin was pasty. His clothes seemed too big for him, but Kurlingen was still a massive man.

"Who's been making you sweat?"

Everhard drew off, not wanting Kurlingen's hand on his shoulder.

"I've been having my troubles, Don." He shook his big head, asking for sympathy. There was none in Everhard's eyes. Then, beaming, and with a hearty tone, "It's great to see you! You are one of the few men I trust—" and so forth.

They went to a corner before a little table. Kurlingen had Scotch and soda, and talked about trifles in a way that made Everhard think of a big, hungry, nervous animal trying to sneak up unsuspected on prey. Then Kurlingen pounced, rubbing his blunt nose with the back of his hand as he asked in a strained, casual voice—

"By the way, I heard the other day that J. K. James' wife is your cousin?"

Everhard tipped him a wink over the Vichy glass, and leaned forward, confidentially.

"Do me a favor and deny it every chance you get."

"Huh?"

"May spoil things for me if it gets out. Into the papers."

"Oh—" Kurlingen listened expectantly.

"Of course I can tell *you*. You see, I was in a jam. No way out. She is a good looking girl and knows how to do things. She took him for a ride—to church. Now's she's got so much on him he has to stay put. Comes in handy for me, eh?"

Kurlingen grunted. His haggard face was mask-like.

"Somebody brought it up over in London, at the club. You've been in the papers there, too. I denied it, of course. Said California was full of Richmonds."

"Thank you." Everhard almost bowed.

"Do anything for you. Anything. Explains a hell of a lot, though, doesn't it? You got a break, you did!"

He shook the ice about in the glass, drained the liquor with a gulp. Then as if something were getting away from him in spite of all precautions, he said hoarsely:

"I'm in a jam myself. Hell of a jam."

He stared queerly at Everhard.

"Not a chance, Kurlingen! My friends have to kill their own snakes. I don't pull James' leg for anybody but little Donald Richmond. Nice boy, little Don. I'd do 'most anything for him. Other people can go jump in the lake—Sulphur Lake."

Everhard put down the Vichy glass and leaned back, smiling.

Kurlingen grunted. He poked a forefinger at the push button, and kept on grunting. Words, muffled and hoarse, half inarticulate, came rumbling.

"Can't sleep. Can't eat. Whisky and soda. That's all. I'm in a real jam. Not even James could break it. But you know what I think of my friends. I do anything for them. That's me." To the waiter, "Double Scotch, plenty ice, damn little soda." Kurlingen extended a hand toward Everhard's knee. The knee moved away, but Kurlingen said, "I'll have to take you around some night and show you what Paris is really like."

"I've always wondered," said Everhard, glancing at his watch.

"And I want to see a lot of you, Don." There was insistence in the hoarse voice. "You are one of the few damned men—"

He guzzled the double Scotch, fiddled with the empty glass, and fixed his eyes broodingly on Everhard, who watched like a hawk that merely pretends to have its head under a wing.

All the fat-gloss was gone from Kurlingen's face. He looked broken. The skin hung under his eyes like empty tobacco pouches, and had about the same color. A rotter, Kurlingen—and now

desperate.

"Don," he growled in a hoarse rumble with something very like sincerity in his voice, "sometimes I'm damn sorry you didn't let that bad loser shoot! I'm in a hell of a jam— Aw—to hell with it all!"

He nodded, still staring at Everhard. He looked away, sneering at nothing, and poked the thick forefinger at the little button. Everhard smiled behind the gambler's expressionless face. He had the feeling that Charles Birk Kurlingen would knife his own mother for a chance to make a profit on her coffin.

EVERHARD walked around the block not to be ahead of time for tea, and so had a look at the neighborhood. It was nice, with the Park Monceau for a front yard.

The tang of a drizzle was in the air, and the misty, gloaming light helped toward a belief in fairies—and witch maidens, white of face, crimson of mouth, with bruised eyelids.

He rode in an automatic gilt-iron elevator to the top floor and stepped out, pushed the bell and heard it whir faintly. A pretty, dark eyed maid in lace cap and lacy apron opened the door. Her hair was drawn back and curled over her ears. Her very short skirt had a pleated flare, and the black silk stockings glistened. She smiled demurely.

Everhard took one hard look at her and did not bat an eye. He thought it bad in poker or elsewhere to show surprise.

"Don't like those curls on your ears, Vilette. You've got nice ears."

Her slim fingers went up slowly and felt the curls all over. Her eyes smiled a little, but with reflected disappointment that he was taking the surprise party so calmly.

"And so you really are a lady's maid, Vilette?"

"Did I ever give you any reason to think I wasn't?"

She spoke English, probably knowing that he liked the lilt and faint tinkle of accents.

He offered her hat, stick and coat. If she wanted to play housemaid with him, all right. She could give some service.

"So you and Mademoiselle Isobel framed this on me?"

"Do you mind?"

"Not so far."

She, lying prettily and with no pretense that she was not lying, said:

"Mademoiselle has been called away, and is so sorry that she can not be back in time to see you. But we may have a little visit, if you are not too disappointed, monsieur."

She was not the child-like girl of the *Trivilia's* deck chair, not the cool young woman of the *Trivilia's* dining room, not the alluring, lying adventuress of the *Trivilia's* cabin trying to bluff him from venturing to Paris. She was a lady's maid, impudent and wary, with a mirror practised impish pout that enticed but would not promise.

"A man would be arrested for bigamy if he married you," said Everhard. "You're half a dozen people all in one. Are we alone?"

"Isn't Miss Blake coming?" The pout was teasing.

"Who?"

"Miss Nora Blake." She pretended to be trying not to laugh at him. "You like Miss Blake very much, don't you?"

"No chance to keep secrets from you. Yes, she's a sweet kid." He looked about at the modernistic furnishings. "Are we alone, Vilette?"

"Why?"

"Say yes and I'll tell you."

"Yes."

"Then pull those buns off your ears and listen. Who is this Mademoiselle Isobel—and why?"

"No one knows—yet?"

"She's in with that gang."

He made the statement, but somehow questioned, demanding her affirmation.

Vilette had a trick for every rôle. As a lady's maid she gave the impression

that if you slipped her a few francs she would talk more freely. She admitted nothing, denied nothing. Her dark eyes were mildly inscrutable, and the hovering smile told nothing.

Everhard nodded.

"I get it. You've been planted on her."

Vilette would not answer. Reluctance shone in her eyes—and wary caution. Teasingly, but with warning—

"Do not try to guess about me, for you will be wrong whatever you think."

"Not so far wrong! See here, how the hell do you dare tell her you know me? And how the devil did she know me at a glance? And why does she turn over her house to her maid, like this? The whole thing has a phony ring, Vilette—except that I know you are genuine!"

"Oh, then you think I can't deceive you?"

"Me, yes, you little devil. But not James! After the Wattison shindy I told it all—"

"I hope not all!" There was playful indignation in the protest.

"All your lies, anyhow. About how you'd kidnaped the real Vilette and that sort of thing. I tied this question on as a tail: 'Can I trust her absolutely? Yes or no.' The answer was, 'Yes—and no!"

"So? Then how can you be sure that I am genuine?"

"That wasn't all the answer, sweetheart. He said, 'She's the cleverest girl in Paris, for her age—or yours.' He said, 'She's a woman, so you can't be sure.' He said, 'I'd trust her. But you use your own judgment!' "

"But after all," she warned him evasively, "you really don't know whether you should or not."

"Pretty child, I don't like those buns!" His hand swept the air as if trying to brush them out of sight. "But listen: I've played poker all my life. In all that time I've never held but one royal flush—and I stole that. I knew the cards were stacked against me, but I meant to win the pot. So I took enough. Somebody's stacking the cards in this game. And there's no chance for me to nail a can't-lose hand. But I'm playing you for a royal flush, Vilette. I'll stay with you all the way in this game, and there is no limit. That goes. You're a tricky little liar, so practise on me all you like. But you're in the fight against that damned Tête de Mort. And I'll stay with you till the showdown. That's how I feel about it, Vilette. So what do we do next?"

She did not move for a long time. Her big, dark eyes widened, child-like, and grew moist, but there were no tears. Her breast rose and fell with slow, deep breathing, and the look on her face was almost as if she had been hurt—but with kindness.

She put out her hand in a simple gesture, took his, said quietly—

"Let us go into the room."

She walked a little ahead, leading him as if he were blind and needed care.

THEY went into a dimly lighted, bizarrely modern room, and sat down together on a low divan before the wood fire that flamed waveringly under a high marble mantel. She held to his hand with gentle, tight firmness. There was no sex about it. Just a weary, sisterly sort of relaxed companionship, as if now for a few minutes she did not have to be on guard, tense, keyed craftily to an evasive rôle.

"I must tell you," she said absently, "before I forget. I am Jeanne Colbert. That is supposed to be my real name. I use it quite openly."

"And may I come often?"

"No, please not. I shall telephone you, or write. It is very difficult, this game of La Tête de Mort. There must be no mistakes."

"You know my number!"

"Oh, of course."

"You do know things, don't you—Vilette?"

She smiled with a slow look that fluttered away toward the fire, and pressed his hand more tightly. The fire grew

hotter. She let go of his fingers and rubbed her hands slowly up and down her legs.

"Let's move back a little," she said, but was scarcely aware of it.

He shifted the divan. They sat down side by side. In silence she unpinned the lace cap and put it beside her. Her slim fingers worked in her hair, taking out pins that she dropped in her lap. Then the pins began to go back. The tips of her fingers felt all about delicately.

"There," she said indulgently, turning her head from side to side. "Is that better?"

The buns had disappeared. She had drawn the hair about her head in the plain, old fashioned way. What pins were left she tossed into the fire.

"Do you really like that little English girl?"

She did not look at him, but her fingers fell into his hand, curling up like fledglings in a nest.

He eyed her. She watched the fire as if reading in flame the words she spoke.

"She's not so darn little," he murmured.

"If you really like her, leave her alone. Don't go near her again."

Her voice was a low monotone. She looked steadily into the fire.

"Why not? Just for instance?"

"I don't know, yet. But they have watched you. Her. She is the first girl you have played with. They will give her money. Always, that first. Then—I don't know." She looked at him calmly. "Don't you know what they want to do, almost have to do, with a man like you?"

"Truth is, Vilette, I didn't know they were really interested in me. Had suspicions. But not a thing that looked—well, ominous."

"They are terribly interested. And they want to get you into some horrible affair. It is their stock trick. Then when you feel nothing can save you, they will save you somehow. And you will be grateful. Have to be, or—" Her fingers tightened. "They stop at nothing."

"Nothing, eh?"

"Nothing. We fight shadows. We know the shadows are cast by fiends. And they are doubtful about you. Almost afraid. For one thing, though Don Everhard has had much trouble with the law, you have had more with criminals."

"Wolves fight among themselves."

"That is true. But they wonder because they know now that your pretty cousin is the wife of J. K. James. James broke La Tête de Mort's hold on New York."

The full light of her eyes turned on him.

"What is it, Vilette?"

"There are many things I mustn't tell you."

"I am asking only one question. Who the devil is Isobel de Nevers?"

She smiled.

"The devil, perhaps. Seems like it at times. Really. But I have suggested to Mademoiselle Isobel and she has suggested to La Tête de Mort, that perhaps one reason you have been so lucky in everything is because James of Washington *is* married to your cousin."

"Good. I had the same bright idea today with Charles Birk Kurlingen. Is he one of 'em?"

"I don't know." She shook her head as if it were unimportant whether or not she knew. "Perhaps. There are so many, and one seldom knows. Hovenden is, though."

Everhard nodded.

"Yes. He smells like one. But, see here, how the devil do you, or anybody, get a chance to suggest things to La Tête de Mort?"

Her smile was tolerant.

"How much you don't know! One is taken blindfolded to a room—"

"And can't be shadowed?"

"Impossible. Oh, for many reasons. For one, you seldom know a minute before when you are to go. The way is craftily hidden. And people watch to

see if any one is following. You are taken to a room. You see no one. You sit, or stand, and answer questions asked in a thick, hoarse, brute-like voice. Of course, only the more important persons have that rare honor. After all, very simple. And baffling. And doesn't happen often. You see, La Tête de Mort has spies everywhere. And he can give orders out of the dark at any time."

"Hmm. But who is this Isobel person, Vilette? And how did you work it to get to see me alone?"

"Oh, I am far more than Mademoiselle Isobel's maid. This is just a part—for today. I thought you would be surprised, and you were merely disappointed. And don't you see, after you wouldn't look at any of the pretty women in silk and jewels, but did take up with that sweet little English girl, why, then, Mademoiselle Isobel—who isn't wholly a fool—thought you wouldn't like her make-up. She said for me to—well, meet you. She has no secrets from me."

"Then she knows you have met me before?"

Vilette hesitated; then, reluctantly:

"Yes, she does. No one else. And never, never let any one know! I was supposed to be in a sanitarium in Switzerland when I went to America. A girl just like me was there . . . "

"Lord," said Everhard admiringly. "You not only skate—you sleep on thin ice, don't you? Terrible to have to be so careful, isn't it? No wonder you put me through the hoops on the *Trivilia*. I forgive you everything but trying to bluff me out of Paris."

SHE lifted his hand, patting it, and said sweetly:

"But now you see why if you could have been what you call bluffed in any way, we wouldn't have wanted you. And you are now my father's royal flush, too. So there!"

"Your father?"

Vilette laughed at him, nodding.

"Yes. The little gutter-searcher. The *trimadeur*," she said airily.

"I'll be damned. And he saved my neck. Or at least I would have been taken in till I heard that bird Hovenden called prince. I thought that was phony—then found out the next morning in the papers that it wasn't. They not only set a stage right, but get critical reviews!"

"But he really is that phonee thing."

"No?"

"My father was long in Egypt and—"

"Does your father by any chance happen to be the gentleman known as Monsieur X?"

"Yes."

She spoke simply, but pride looked up out of her eyes.

Everhard smiled pleasantly, grinned broadly, asked—

"Will it be all right, Vilette, if I fall in love with you?"

"No, no!" Up went a warning finger. "You are to be in love with Mademoiselle Isobel!"

"Whom I haven't met." He shook his head. "If you are serious—"

"I am serious." Her tone left no doubt. "She is very stupid. She thinks every one loves her, so—"

"I wouldn't say stupid. Lovers have paid for this furniture and the stuff she wears. She's not my type."

"But you have said that you trusted me," she protested, with a hint of coaxing.

"I do."

"Then do as I say, please."

"Why the mystery?"

"There is no mystery if you but understood one thing. La Tête de Mort has found her useful. Men are fascinated by her because she has no mercy, no conscience, no passion. She is fantastic and dangerous, notorious—and in France that is fame. Every vain little man with two francs in his pocket thinks perhaps he can make the conquest of Isobel de Nevers and be admired by the whole world. Pah! Men find her contemptuous, so—" Vilette gestured expressively—"that hurts their pride. So

many think he may be the envied one who quickens her passion. Just as so many men buy racehorses, hoping for the Grand Prix."

"Sounds like bunk to me," he said, unimpressed. "Some man 'll stand her on her ear."

"And you—" she touched his breast with a forefinger—"are to be the one."

"Go on. I like to hear you. You have such a musical voice, especially when lying."

"No, no, no! I am serious. She will do whatever I say. I can betray her secret to La Tête de Mort! I am the one person she fears. I shall command that she love you—understand?"

"Nope."

"And I am begging you to pretend to love her."

"Then what?"

"La Tête de Mort will be deceived, and think that through her he has a hold on you. Don't you see?"

"No, I don't see," said Everhard impatiently. "I think you've left something out of the story. Purposely. But what I want to know now is if Hovenden is phony, who is he and how does he get away with it?"

"Ah, that! Well, it is easier to be sure than to prove he is not the prince. But my father was long in Egypt, and worked to put old Fered on the throne. Yet Hovenden lives in the same ancient house where Fered lived and did terribly cruel things, so it is said. And he is wholly unlike Fered, or any other El Kasyd. He is followed night and day. He has been trapped with friends even into the taxi my father sometimes drives. My father has watched whom he meets and where he goes. We have put spies into his home, and learned nothing—except that he talks much aloud to himself. But the walls are thick. His mail has been read. His telephone has been tapped and some one listens night and day. Even a fire broke out in his house that my father might enter with men who used axes and cut into the walls for secrets. Nothing was learned."

"Yet you know he is one of them?"

"Yes. My father believes that he is somehow the key to the mystery."

"Why not put him up in a corner and stick pins in him. Maybe he'd tell things."

"Maybe he would," she agreed, amused. "But for some strange reason, La Tête de Mort himself seems to despise Hovenden, yet uses him. And we doubt that even if he tried he could tell anything worthwhile. And tell me," she asked, abruptly, "what do you think of Monsieur Biradou?"

"I don't like him," said Everhard promptly. "Why?"

She looked at a slipper buckle.

"Why not?"

"If he is as clever as I think he is, he's dangerous. Why 'd you mention him, Vilette?"

"I shall whisper a secret." She put her foot down, brushed at her skirt and, leaning closer said, not earnestly but as if truthful:

"Shh-h! Never tell. But Monsieur Biradou is very, very, *very* devoted to the fair lady Isobel!"

"Glad to hear it. He's not as smart as I thought."

Vilette laughed.

"My father says that too. That Monsieur Biradou is not nearly as clever as he makes people believe." Her glance was speculative. Then, "Ah, how you will like my father!"

The telephone rang. She turned, listening as if meaning to let it ring.

"I had better answer it."

But she did not stir, and presently the phone stopped.

She sighed, stretched her feet toward the fire and crossed her ankles, folded her hands behind her head, leaning far back.

"Just to be a little while with somebody you don't have to watch! You have no idea how we, all of us, even Isobel—she especially!—are watched, spied on. And one little slip— I know—how well I know!"

Everhard had much to ask, but said nothing. To speak now, or move, seemed about as if to awaken one who very wearily had at last fallen into a restful doze. He watched her admiringly. Her motionless eyes gazed at the fire.

The telephone began ringing again. Vilette sighed and moved, getting up at once, but reluctantly. She crossed the room, pressed a button and the telephone came from a little compartment in the wall.

" 'Allo." Her voice was indifferent.

The next instant her lithe body turned on motionless feet and her glance, with startled intensity, struck on Everhard's face. She listened, watching him anxiously, then interrupting with rippling French and a tone of authority:

"One moment, please. I can not hear well. I must close the door."

She ran to Everhard.

"Quick, you must go! It is the voice of one who must be obeyed. And he demands Mademoiselle Isobel, who is in her room and must come." She was half forcibly pulling Everhard toward the door. "She will not come unless you are gone. Please—"

He yielded, not protesting but somehow not believing her.

She slapped his hat crosswise on his head, bundled the coat into his arms, poked the gloves at a coat pocket, hooked his stick over an elbow, gave him a push, opened the door and caught his arm.

"And stay away from Nick Dodalus!"

He paused, resisting, and asked—

"Why on earth?"

Vilette shook her head quickly.

"Not now!"

She closed the door against him. He tried to flip a loose end of his topcoat into the door and so keep it from locking, but the trick didn't work.

He was mystified and suspicious, but grinned a little because it was so much as if a husband had unexpectedly come in the back way.

"Try to tell me," he said to himself, "in a layout like this there is no extension where Miss Isobel could talk! Tell me we are alone, then tell me Isobel is home! Vilette, you've pulled a fast one."

He stood broodingly for a moment or two with eyes closed, bringing back the picture of Isobel de Nevers in the Tohu-Bohu, taking off the gold wig, wiping away the wax-like plaster, rubbing the rouge from the crimson mouth. He said solemnly:

"I'll be damned! You amazing little devil. No wonder you can make Isobel do whatever you damn well please!" He nodded and poked the elevator button. "She had to come to the phone. And the cat would have been out of the bag if you let me stay!"

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAP IN THE RUE VESLE

EVERHARD went back to his apartment to dress for the evening. Mademoiselle Houlette eyed him questioningly. He shook his head.

"The fair lady decided that her mother was dying, or something, and didn't show up. I just met Monsieur Guyot down on the street. Perhaps he's just back from England?"

"England, monsieur?"

"Didn't you know? He goes often."

"Not since they have been in this house, monsieur."

"No?"

"Every morning I open all the windows to air our rooms. There is no morning that I have not heard him swearing at madame. I would have noticed even if there had been no bad words shouted."

"Poor madame," Everhard murmured sympathetically.

"She gives monsieur soup from the same pot!" said Houlette, and shrugged her angular shoulders.

Everhard strolled into the Horseshoe, but at once caught sight of two men, neither of whom he cared to talk with.

One was Kurlingen, bulking in a chair that faced the entrance to the lounge, as

if watching for somebody. But he was giving an order to a waiter—holding up two fingers, which meant double Scotch —and did not see Everhard.

He probably would not have run from Kurlingen since he suspected the man of knowing things he wanted to learn; but there was also Monsieur Biradou, black of beard, straight as a general having his picture taken, and clicking his graphlex eyes, while the fox-faced secretary humbly talked over Biradou's shoulder as if wanting him to find out who had fixed one of the house wheels, or got to the card decks in the safe and marked them. Everhard preferred not to be brought to Biradou's attention. As one of the chiefs of the Sûreté, a man of tremendous importance, he could make anybody he took a dislike to very unhappy.

On the street he found it was raining hard. He mentally tossed a coin to see whether he went home and enjoyed the fire, or went to the Rue Pigalle and told some lies to Nora.

"Tell her my wife's come home and won't let me play out at night any more."

He wedged into a place behind a table in the little American bar and ordered tea for a change. He pretended to read a newspaper, but wondered which of this crowd was, and had been, keeping an eye on him. Useless wonder. As yet he felt that he had no reason to dodge anybody who wanted to shadow him; but he was curious.

Nora came along a little after eleven. Her tam was wet, her stockings and feet soaking. She shivered, hugging her damp coat with the rabbit fur pulled tight about her neck. She looked hollow eyed and a bit faded from the night before, and needed sleep.

"You are drinking hot whisky," he told her as she squeezed in beside him. "Where's Betty? And why the wet clothes?"

"We had a taxi home, but I decided not to go to bed, and came along over here."

"Just paused, as it were, on the way to the hospital—with pneumonia."

"I'll be all right. We only live once. It's enough, don't you think? How is Mr. Nick?"

"Oh, he'll be out again tonight. He makes the rounds for exercise. His daily dozen. Or playing poker. You haven't eaten all day? Be truthful."

"Tea and toast. And some candied cherries. It is cold."

She sipped hot whisky, smoked and looked thoughtful.

Everhard studied her face, now a little pale and drawn, with a faint dark shadow under her eyes; but still a sweet face, and honest.

"If I were an honorable gentleman, Nora, I'd spank you and put you to bed with a hot water bottle. As it is, the best I can do is say 'let's eat.' Then you get into bed and stay there sixteen hours."

She turned eagerly.

"Let's go to Belito's."

"Don't know it."

"I've never been there either. But they say it's wonderful."

"All you do is eat. No dancing. Where is the joint?"

Nora put out her cigaret, opened her bag, fished about and got an envelop on which an address had been written.

"Where's Rue Vesle?" he asked.

"Don't know, I'm sure. But they say it's a jolly place."

The taxi, after wandering through the rain in Montmartre, turned into a black little street and stopped where light glowed through a door of painted green glass. Everhard shook Nora and she stirred drowsily on his shoulder, then woke up.

The green glass door opened at once. A thin, half bald waiter, on the watch for guests, looked out and, opening an umbrella in the entrance, stepped across the two-foot sidewalk and made a marquee of sorts.

Inside, Everhard took a look about. The ceiling was low, the room narrow and not well lighted. The walls were

askew, as if the house, growing old, had started to fall down but on second thought decided to wait awhile.

There was a long, old, sleeve polished table on one side, and two or three small tables on the other. The long table had no covering at all; the little tables were laid with oilcloth, and if you sat at one of them the bill would probably be a franc more.

Men at the long table were playing dominoes, and indifferently looked at Everhard and Nora. A man and a woman were at a small table. The woman eyed Nora with a sneer. Professionals in every line hate the novice.

"Not in this dump," said Everhard. "We're not sightseeing. I want you to eat."

But as he pulled at her arm, a man with a big mustache, dark eyes, pale face and short, stout body, came on the trot to make them welcome. If his face had been red instead of pale he would have looked like a butcher in Sunday clothes.

Ah, he exclaimed, how he would reward madame and monsieur for coming to his humble café on such a wet, cold night. So many Americans came often, and were his friends. A wonderful country, America. The private room, of course.

"This way, if you please."

With beacon-like forefinger sticking up over his shoulder as if it were sore and had to be held carefully, he led the way back to a curtained cubbyhole and turned on the light.

The table was laid with fresh linen, and the dishes looked as if they had been washed instead of merely wiped. Some of the queer little obscure places do have very fine food, and this looked as if fairly discriminating guests did come now and then. There were even flowers—geraniums. You could see where the wilted blooms had been picked off.

The host himself bustled welcomingly; and the waiter, looking like a saddened, wet rat, got helpfully in the way.

"You see," said Nora, rubbing her fingers over the clean linen, then bending to sniff the stale geraniums, "they do have people in."

"Who touted this joint?"

"One of the girls in the show. Said she came often."

"Been with the show long?"

"Long as I have. Why?"

"Why?" Everhard repeated evasively. "Oh, I have to make conversation somehow."

The host rattled off the wine list; but Everhard interrupted—

"No wine."

"No wine, monsieur?"

"No wine."

"No wine!"

He groaned as if Everhard had pulled a tooth, and backed out under the doorway curtain.

YET the service came through without noticeable discourtesy. The food was simple, and Nora said it was good. Everhard did nothing more than mess up his plate so the host wouldn't feel insulted, and gave her his portions.

The dessert came. Everhard sniffed wine sauce and pushed it toward Nora.

"Good!" she said.

"Pretty girls like sweets. Grown men like pretty girls. In that way everybody gets their sugar. You don't know yet who sent you that money?"

"You didn't, honest?"

"Yes, of course. And don't ever let any other man make you think he did it!"

She looked fixedly at the dessert and kept on eating. She put the empty dish aside.

"I feel better in knowing you did it than any one else." She tapped the empty dish with the spoon, nervously. "But please don't do it any more."

"I'm inclined to think I'm going to do it again—and soon." He pushed the second dessert before her. "Here, eat this. In fact, I think perhaps I'll enclose a ticket to England in the next letter. Would you use it?"

"Whatever for?"

She replaced the full spoon in the dish to look at him.

"A rich friend of mine gives me an allowance to spend on nice girls every year. You see, if I give it all to you in a lump sum, then I won't have to go searching around for another year. Hurry up so you can get to bed."

She rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand.

"I am sleepy, all right."

Everhard watched her, wondering what lie to tell next. And even as he looked she dropped forward, and did not move.

He shook her, not speaking; then listened. There was no longer the click of dominoes, no murmur of words over the game. Not a sound. Not even a sound in the nearby kitchen. He recalled not having heard any one go out. He stood up with a foot on the seat of the chair and looked over the partition. The café was empty. Glasses and saucers remained on the little table. The dominoes lay in zig-zag lines, as when players get up and go away before the game is finished.

He stepped down, eyeing the drawn curtains. He sat down and turned toward Nora. She lay face forward on the crook of an elbow; the other arm dangled loosely at her side. He shook her, not speaking. She did not stir.

He reflected:

"So somebody at the American bar overheard her say Belito's. Telephoned, or sent a messenger. And we were expected."

Vilette's warning, "If you really like her, leave her alone. Stay clear away from her", now seemed an inside tip.

He placed his hand against Nora's breast, listening with sensitive fingertips, and kept his eyes on the curtain. A poker player's fingertips are as good as a stethoscope.

Everhard sat back, carefully quiet, waiting. He did not feel uncomfortable. He was awake, with his back to the wall, and a .45 under his coat. The pale faced Belito could do the worrying.

There was the noiseless tiptoe of a stealthy foot. The curtain stirred, was gently drawn aside, and the half bald, rat-like waiter peered in with eyes set in the tense furtiveness that is like a confession.

"All right, start the show!" said Everhard.

An explosive expression popped on the rat-like face, and the fellow squeaked, letting the curtain fall.

"The man is awake!"

Everhard was up, shifted the table and had the curtains half off their rings all in time to see the waiter scoot frantically past the pale Belito in the kitchen doorway. Belito looked more like a butcher than ever now that he had a long knife in his hand.

He gave Everhard a wild stare that focused on a leveled automatic, flung the knife far behind him, turned with a yell of fright and bolted. Pans clattered as if thrown when he bumped a table that was in his way. A moment later there was the jar of a heavy back door as it swung shut.

Everhard, without any haste at all, but carefully destructive, pitched the chairs out of the cubby hole, making room. The snap of their frail legs had a pleasant sound. He jerked off the curtains and kicked them out of the way, then put on his coat and pulled his hat down tightly.

He wadded Nora's purse into his topcoat pocket, snapped his walking stick across his knee so Monsieur Belito could not get any profit from the fact that he was leaving it behind, and gathered Nora into his arms.

The front door was locked with a bolt —to keep people out, not in.

He went out into the rain, carrying Nora as if she were a very heavy and completely limp baby. It was a dark little side street with an uneven narrow sidewalk and cobbled street. The rain fell blindingly. Everhard did not know where he was, did not greatly care, being pleased that whatever story Mon-

sieur Belito cared to tell there was one that he couldn't make stick. Everhard had not quarreled with the girl and stabbed her.

HE WANDERED, stumbling about, always taking any street that led downhill. He did not see a taxi until he came upon one with the driver asleep in the front seat. Everhard spoke, but the driver was not easily awakened.

He opened the door and struggled in. The jar of his rather awkward effort to carry a girl through the narrow door and place her on the seat stirred the driver into wakefulness. As it was dark in the cab, the driver took it for granted the fare who had told him to wait had returned.

Everhard gave the address. The driver hesitated as if sensing that something wasn't right; but he was an old driver, therefore discreet. Off he went. Everhard held Nora against him on the seat. If he had just fished her out of the Seine neither of them could have been wetter.

When Everhard got out and asked for help, the old driver saw that something had been slipped over on him. He wanted to talk about it. Everhard coaxed him with a handful of francs, and the suggestion that he could hurry back and probably pick up the other fare anyhow. He may have wondered why Everhard tipped him so much more heavily than seemed necessary, even under the circumstances. Perhaps he would understand if his next fare yelled that the water was ankle deep and the leather seat like a sponge. But perhaps he would get a drunk who didn't notice.

It was a very poor concierge Nora had. The old witch was so used to letting people in and out at all hours of the night that she pressed her latch lock button without waking up.

He made a rumpus and she turned on the light and stared at him out of the shadows. Gray, lank hair fell about her face. Her nightgown was not clean. When she saw a stranger in dress clothes —dirty, wet dress clothes, but dress clothes—and an unconscious girl in his arms, the hag began to make a clamor and frantically talk of the police, figuring to get a bigger tip than by being agreeable. Everhard told her some things in the sort of French that made her think perhaps he wasn't, after all, an American. So she let him put Nora on a couch and use the telephone.

He rang the Horseshoe Club and asked for Nick Dodalus. It was a chance, but Everhard felt lucky.

"Tell him a man, not a woman, is calling."

Dodalus came to the phone, impatiently gruff.

"This is Richmond, Nick. What are you doing?"

"Oh, hello, you. Me, I'm taking Kurlingen's pants away from him."

"Good. Take his shirt, too. Listen—this is private. Send a doctor up here. One that's got lockjaw. Nora passed out on me, and I'm in a hurry."

The old witch had modestly got into a dirty red dressing gown and, having sized things up, now wanted to be agreeable. She whined affably—

"Ah, Mademoiselle Blake was such a nice girl!"

"She's still a nice girl. Just sprained her ankle and the pain made her faint."

Everhard started up the dim, crooked stairs. Nora seemed to gain weight. A trail of water marked the way and some of it was sweat. A very dim light burned in the fourth floor hallway.

He kicked on the door. There was no answer. He kicked again, and a neighboring door opened. A frowsy man looked out, grumbling:

"What is all this noise about? Those English girls, they are no good!"

"You," said Everhard, "are a damn liar." Imperatively, "Come here. Her purse is in my pocket. Take it out and find the key. Unlock this door—and keep what change you find."

The man, a young one who slept in his underwear—the kind that went from un-

washed neck to dirty ankles—came with greedy readiness, muttering—

"The police may ask about this."

"And if they do, don't lie. Tell them the truth. The truth may be that I kicked you down the stairs—and will, if you make another crack like that. And I should like the police to think well of me."

The fellow gave him a startled look. He was not used to finding people unafraid of the police when blackmail was hinted. However, glad for the chance at any little windfall, he took out the purse and got the few franc notes in his fingers before he took out the key. He opened the door.

"Put the purse back in my pocket. And you are not coming in."

Everhard stepped blindly into the unlighted room and kicked the door to, shutting out the curious face.

"Betty? Betty!"

No answer. He cracked his shin on a rocker, and fumblingly eased Nora into it.

He felt about for the light. There was no wall switch. The light came on. It was a weak bulb. The room was about twelve by sixteen and had a gas plate, a dresser, a lacquered pine table covered with unwashed tea things, a small kitchen sink of zinc, some framed chromos and a couch that served as a double bed. The carpet was lobster-red, badly faded and stained, especially as it got toward the sink and plate, where it crawled as if ashamed of itself under a strip of worn linoleum.

Betty slept face up, with both arms curved about her curly head. She looked like a naughty angel who had gone to bed without washing her face. He shook her, but it did no good. He held a thumb and forefinger to her nose and the palm over her mouth. That brought her around with nightmarish struggling. She sat up, frightened, blinking.

"What are you doing here?" she asked uneasily.

"Nora's had bad luck. Ptomaine or something. Doctor's on the way. Help get her out of these wet clothes and into bed."

Betty, with a scrambling kick at the bed covering and flurry of the nightgown—she might skimp on food, but she slept in silk—threw herself passionately at Nora, hugged her wet body, kissed her cold mouth, got her own flimsy silk all wet and didn't mind, but tugged at the soaked coat. She flung the coat on the floor, swished the wet tam at the wall, tossed the slippers unseeingly toward the sink, but stripped off the wet stockings with gentle care so as not to start runs.

Everhard helped lift Nora on to the foot of the bed—the foot so as not to dampen any other part of the covering. Betty, tender and frantic, went on undressing her.

Everhard, with a shoulder against the doorway, regarded her steadily.

"If the recording angel doesn't blot all your black marks for this, I'll have him fired, Betty."

THE doctor came, with Nick Dodalus puffing at his side from the long climb on the stairs. He held a freshly lighted cigar. Betty absently gave one hand to Dodalus, who kept it. She gathered the faded dressing gown tightly with the other and crouched by the bed, peering now at the doctor, now at Nora.

Everhard in quick French told the doctor that they had ventured into the wrong sort of place, and he, not being hungry, had accidentally passed up whatever dishes contained the knockout drops. Betty, understanding little more French than café and shopping phrases, did not catch it.

Dodalus growled. His soft eyes grew hard. What he said wasn't a nice thing to say, but Everhard thought the better of him for it.

"How'd you come out with Kurlingen?" Everhard asked.

"Got an I.O.U. instead of a check. Maybe he needs some money. I'll ask tomorrow."

"Don't do it, Nick."

"Why not?"

"Has anybody ever tried to put the screws on you? Get you into a hole? Kick you into something you didn't want to do?"

"Just all my life!" said Dodalus, grinning. "I tell 'em to go to hell and forget it. I mean I forget it. I don't trust Kurlingen, but I'm way into him, so just as a friend—"

"He has no friends, Nick. Just victims."

"Why, he said you and him were the best of friends!"

"He'd say anything."

The doctor gave Nora a hypodermic of some kind.

A sixteen thousand dollar limousine with liveried chauffeur waited in the rain long after a cloudy dawn became hazy daylight; and a famous Champs Élysées doctor, a millionaire tobacco merchant, and a hard boiled poker player sat, stood or walked about in the shabby room of an unclean tenement, waiting for a back row chorus girl to wake up and smile.

Dodalus and the doctor went away. Everhard promised to stay for breakfast, so Betty went to buy something to eat. Nora sat up against bunched pillows with fingers pressing her head.

"Come clean. Who sent you to Belito's?"

"Madge Kenyon. And—wait till I see her!"

"Somebody got to her, somehow. She didn't know what it was all about. An old trick, that sort of thing from the people I play with. Listen, I'll tell you some secrets. But don't repeat 'em. Not even to Betty. You won't, I know. I'm a communist agent. Some people who don't like me framed that play. We beat 'em to the door. They may bother you—want you to answer questions. So you are going to England—you and Betty. You girls go to some quiet place and rest."

"You don't need to give me money. Just enough for passage, maybe. I want to go home, anyhow. Honest, I do. I'll give notice at the theater and in a week—"

"Week, hell! You're going by air. Today—noon!"

They went, flushed, tense, excited, uneasy, but wholly joyful in feeling that this was real adventure. Everhard complacently decided that a little vacation wouldn't do much harm, except that they might fatten up from idling and eating regularly.

CHAPTER XII

EVERHARD ACCEPTS AN INVITATION TO TEA

ONE morning Everhard saw an item in the paper that did not make him weep. The police had identified a mutilated body a tug churned up in the Seine as that of one Belito, proprietor of a café on the Rue Vesle, who had been missing for a week. Perhaps he had talked as well as bungled.

There also came, by mail, a little illustrated magazine, with a marked item under a picture of Isobel de Nevers. It said that a new admirer had been admitted to Isobel's intimate circle, one Don Richmond, an industrious American gentleman who strongly approved of prohibition—for the same reason that ammunition makers find war ennobling.

"Vilette's press agents are on the job," Everhard reflected.

There had been a telephone in the apartment when Everhard got it. He had let it remain—in the name of the party from whom he had taken a sublease. And he had given the number to no one. Vilette had said she knew it; but she was likely to know anything the police could find out.

But Kurlingen telephoned.

"We must have a little visit, Don. Where've you been keeping yourself? How about lunch?"

"If you'll tell me how you got my phone number."

"I asked Nick if he knew, and he gave

it to me."

"Oh, of course."

In the Horseshoe Club, Dodalus threw away his cigar and sauntered over to the magazines where Everhard seemed to be glancing about for something to read.

"Oh, hello, Nick. Still lucky?"

Dodalus clipped the end of a fresh cigar, struck twice at the match box and raised the flame to the cigar between his lips.

"I took your tip." He was trying to talk with the cigar in his mouth, but removed it. "I'm not accepting I.O.U's. Kurlingen don't like it."

"Ugly?"

"Hurt-like." Dodalus eyed the cigar's tip critically, put it into his mouth, then resolutely jerked it out again. "Wonder can I give you a tip about something?"

"Nothing I'd like better."

"You won't get mad?"

"Never lost my temper in my life. Brings wrinkles—and knocks the spots off your poker."

"Listen—" He moved closer, half whispering. "Lay off that Isobel de Nevers. She's bad."

"No?"

"Yes!"

"Know her?"

"Hell, no. I ain't that kind of a fool. But she dopes men. That's how she nails 'em to the cross. It ain't her charms—she ain't got any. It's dope!"

"Really, Nick? How'd you learn that?"

"Prince Hovenden—he told me. On the quiet."

"Ah! Did he suggest that you mention it to me?"

"No. But he said she's hooked you. You're her latest."

"But no doubt he meant for you to speak to me. Thoughtful of him. Very thoughtful fellow, the prince. By the way, Nick, do you know my phone just in case you might want to call me?"

"No, but I'd like to." He groped for a notebook and gold pen. Everhard gave him the number, incorrectly.

"Thanks. Sometimes I don't know what to do with myself. What are you doing tonight?"

"Sleep."

"Hell of a way at your age, and in Paris, to waste time," said Dodalus, rebukingly. "You like Prince Hovenden, don't you?"

"Oh, sure."

Dodalus drew closer, confidentially.

"If something happened in Egypt—and anything's likely to happen in that damn country—he might be a real king." Dodalus glowed with enthusiasm. "I've got some pull in that country, too."

"See here, Nick—don't go day dreaming. Old Fered himself couldn't make the grade. The French wanted him, the English didn't. The English muddle things in war and international politics—oh, terribly! But for the other fellow, always!"

Dodalus stared at him so long and blankly that his freshly lighted cigar went out.

"How do you know?"

"Know what, Nick?"

"About—oh, nothing." He eyed the cold cigar tip. "About what can or can't be done in Egypt?"

He wiped his forehead with the heel of his palm without looking up.

"Egypt? Hell, I'm not talking about Egypt. I'm talking about English history. So long, Nick."

From the door Everhard saw him standing there, still gazing at the cold tip of the cigar.

Kurlingen tried to be hearty, but was only noisy. Everhard, meeting him for the first time in daylight, thought he looked worse than ever; and pretending to pick a hair off his lapel got a near view of the big diamond in his tie and learned a lot. Kurlingen must have been hit harder than any one suspected.

They went to a restaurant where Kurlingen ate stewed eel, creamed chicken, with a side dish of goose and beans, drank Burgundy, and for dessert had *pêches flamées*, all the while complain-

ing that his appetite wasn't what it used to be. Which was true.

"What you been doing with yourself, Don? Nobody sees you much. No way to treat friends."

"I go to the museums a lot. Am making a study of lace. Intricate and dainty subject, lace. May take up crocheting."

Kurlingen, once a bulldozer, had certainly slipped. Something had got his nerve, his old self-assurance. Since there was a bit of sun, they went for a drive in the Bois. He told Everhard there was no man he so liked, trusted, admired so much . . . He asked if Everhard wanted any help in getting some ships filled with the best stuff and off to the Pacific? Said he had influence; said he would be glad to use it for Everhard.

For two hours, Kurlingen, growing more and more fretful, hinted, pried, pulled, cajoled, and tried to get Everhard to confide the least little thing of his affairs in him. It was a chill day, but moisture trickled on Kurlingen's sweatband and he frequently took off his hat to wipe his forehead.

When Everhard stepped from his car near the Opera, Kurlingen said:

"That lunch don't set well. I'm going to a drug store. See you tomorrow." With what was meant to be affectionate earnestness, "If you ever want advice or influence, call on me, my boy! I'll never forget how you saved my life that time!"

EVERHARD walked toward the Isle Saint Louis by going down the Rue de la Paix. Even though he did not wear diamonds, any more than he painted pictures, he liked them—both diamonds and pictures.

There, directly in front of De Rossi's, he came face to face with Hovenden and Vilette.

She was now a Parisienne from feather's tip to fastidiously dainty toe. Her hat was a half helmet sort of thing that appeared to be made of bronze beaten into polished scales; and a cluster of red stones held up a bronze-like metal feather. Her dark hair was barely visible in little wispy curls that looked as though they had crowded out all by themselves instead of having been pulled and twisted into place, ornamentally. The chinchilla hugged her slim body.

Quickly Vilette put out her hand, turning to Hovenden.

"I have asked Mr. Richmond to call me Mademoiselle Colbert."

She was pointedly reminding him of a name he might have forgotten.

Hovenden bowed as if his shoulder braces were too tight.

"You must come with us to the Ritz for tea."

Her tone was insistent, and her hand, with obvious affection, pressed his arm. In fact, she made Everhard a little uncomfortable by so pointedly ignoring Hovenden, and being so pleased at having chanced on him.

They had not been at the table ten minutes before Hovenden was called to the telephone; and he was still in sight when Vilette said quickly:

"You were very lucky, my friend, at Belito's! No one seems to know just what happened, except that you got away all right—and La Tête de Mort is furious."

"So I saw by the papers."

"Please listen. I must talk quickly. We haven't but two minutes. I want you to know that they will keep after you until in some way they do get you into a horrible mess. You must do something yourself."

"What do you suggest, Vilette?"

"They would have killed that poor English girl. They want you charged with some terrible crime. Can't you do something like—oh, I don't know what! Something that will make them believe you are a clever criminal. They are afraid merely to ask you to join La Tête de Mort. That isn't their way. They offer a membership, or whatever you call it, to people who are in trouble. So they have to get you into trouble—and

they will! Don't you realize—"

"All that's unimportant," said Everhard impatiently. "When do I get to see the lovely Isobel with whom I am in love?"

"We have been awfully busy, and—"

"You and Isobel, eh?"

Vilette looked at him keenly, then stirred her tea. She looked up again:

"Did you guess? Or were told?"

"Guessed it, child. Your telephone must have an extension. She could have talked over that."

She turned the setting of a ring and studied it, then moved it around again.

"It is all right, I suppose. Lots of people do know that Jeanne Colbert is Isobel de Nevers. I just thought it better if you didn't, yet."

"How can they think I am in love with anybody I don't see?"

"Well, then, do something daring and criminal to prove it." She spoke lightly, but was in earnest. "I am very greedy and avaricious. You must make me presents—"

"Hovenden is jealous of me?"

"Oh, very!"

"You make me happy. I don't like him."

"Neither do I," said Vilette, emphatically.

"But—ah, I see something now! That fellow Biradou is devoted not to Isobel, but to little Vilette herself!"

She laughed a little, but shook her head.

"Mostly to Isobel."

"And doesn't he suspect that she is hooked up with the Death's Headers?"

"As to that," she said impudently, "you had better inquire of Monsieur Biradou himself!"

"You've told me. He's one of 'em. And on the inside, isn't he?"

"He would like to be," she said slowly, glancing aside to see if Hovenden were returning. "I knew he expected a call here. That's one reason I brought you along. So we could have a minute alone. And, too, I wanted him to see that I—I mean that *Isobel* likes you very much!" She looked into his eyes.

"Well, if she never stops deceiving me, I shall be quite content. But please, Vilette, what's wrong with Dodalus?"

"Nothing much." She was looking across the room watchfully. "Only keep away from him. He's not the type they want or can use. He has no reputation, so they can't blackmail him. Has all the money he wants, and more, so they can't buy him. His business is in the Near East and he deals with men who trust him and wouldn't trust anybody else, so they couldn't get control of it if he died. But he has the silly notion of wanting to get Hovenden to the throne of Egypt! And if you go around with him, they— Here comes Monsieur Hovenden—"

Her hands moved in restrained fluttering, and she talked gay chitter-chatter, not seeming to notice Hovenden's return until Everhard arose.

CHAPTER XIII

KURLINGEN CALLS

IT BEGAN to rain shortly after dark. Everhard decided to remain at home. At midnight he was in dressing gown and slippers, with an open book on his lap, dreamily eyeing the wet night through the tall, open French windows. The chill, moist air was pleasant because a great bed of coals heated the room. There were radiators, but about all they did was to thump and leak, and were never even lukewarm at midnight.

The doorbell rang. He started to rise, but at once heard the long stride of Mademoiselle Houlette. There was a moment's low chatter of women's voices. Houlette, with a card on a tray, marched in followed breathlessly by her fat cousin, Madame Thurot the concierge, who began to talk at once.

Everhard picked up the card; it was Kurlingen's.

Madame Thurot was still talking, and acting now, too.

He flipped the card back on the tray.

"Monsieur does not read the message," said Mademoiselle Houlette, and held out the tray again.

Madame Thurot did not pause.

He turned the card over and read—

> I have told these damn fools you sent for me, but they won't believe it.—K.

Everhard stood up, laying the book aside, and spun the card into the fire. He watched it as if to get his decision from how the card burned. It struck squarely on the coals, smoked a moment, then little yellow flames quickly ate it.

Everhard thanked the women and asked them to show the visitor in.

Kurlingen came, gasping. A big, flabby man, sweating in a dress suit. A huge diamond-like stud glistened on the front of his shirt, and by artificial light looked genuine.

He advanced toward Everhard with both hands out.

"I told you, my dear boy, that you could count on me, day or night. And here I am!"

Without any particular inflection, Everhard said:

"Yes. Here you are."

"How devilish hot it is!"

Kurlingen wiped his face and the soft folds of his fat neck.

Everhard heaved his biggest chair sidewise to the open windows, and gestured invitingly. The cool air stirred the heavy curtains. Kurlingen pulled the chair even a little nearer the window and sat down. He looked eager, pleased, almost satisfied.

"Can I have a drink, my boy?"

"Water?"

Mademoiselle Houlette came with a glass of water. Kurlingen gave her a long, unfavorable look. He drank half the glass, and asked—

"She speak English?"

"No."

"Why don't you get yourself a good looking housekeeper?"

Everhard said without emphasis—

"If you didn't have money, Kurlingen, even bums would kick you out."

Kurlingen gulped the rest of the water, laughed, thinking it was a joke. He gave back the glass to the woman without thanking her. She left the room. He rubbed his hands on the moist handkerchief, scrubbed the inside of his stiff collar, gulped a few deep breaths of cool air and gazed expectantly at Everhard.

"Well, now, my dear boy, what can I do for you?"

"For me?"

"Yes—I got your message. You said twelve. I'm right on the dot."

Kurlingen rubbed his palms together and beamed.

Everhard turned to the fire and put on another log. There was a silver platter on the mantel. Houlette kept it scoured to a mirror's sheen. He could see Kurlingen's reflection in that. Everhard reluctantly decided that Kurlingen was not lying.

Everhard went to a table, pushed the open book aside, sat on a corner and, with both hands deep in the gown's pockets, asked:

"Now who do you suppose could have played a trick like that—on you? Or is it on me?"

"You mean—"

Kurlingen half rose, staring, from his chair.

"I do," said Everhard.

Kurlingen dropped back as if from a hard blow. He gasped questioningly—

"Before God?"

Everhard looked at him, not moving. Kurlingen groaned vaguely. He swore, then collapsed into a shapeless bulk, quite as if half the life had been beaten out of him.

Pretty much of an actor, Kurlingen; or was once, and could bluster, frown, glare, be brutally domineering, and get away with it. Being emotional was a new stunt. Everhard, thoroughly distrusting and disliking him, was scarcely even interested.

"Don, I'm smashed, broke, and—and if you don't help me—"

Having said it, he plainly wished he hadn't. Something very like a look of hate flashed in his eyes, and he wiped his face as if hiding something. When he dropped the hand the look had passed.

"How so?"

Everhard picked up the open book as if about to read.

Kurlingen seemed trying to take hold of himself, fumbled for a cigaret case, and drew out something trinket-like that he hastily thrust back with a startled flash of his eyes to see if Everhard had noticed.

His fingers trembled as he selected a cigaret.

"Give me a match, will you?" Then, prodded by an afterthought, "Please."

Everhard tore a strip of newspaper, twisted it, crossed to the fire, lighted it and held the flame to Kurlingen's cigaret. He sat down again on the edge of the table.

Kurlingen blew smoke through his nose and mouth as he spoke. His voice had an echo of the old bullying quality.

"I'm going to put you in touch with certain parties that—anything you want; *anything!* They'll give it to you! That's how much I think of you."

Everhard, in critical silence, reflected:

"You're in dutch with the gang, but have probably bragged as to how you could handle me. They've given you a chance, and if you don't make good, you're all through. And you know it."

Kurlingen was saying:

"I'm in with some big men. And I'm going to give you—you got to take it!" That was the old-time Kurlingen's voice. "The chance for millions. You, me, them!"

"One, two, three—simple. Millions, eh?"

Kurlingen arose domineeringly. It was his old trick of seeming to force men to take the great favors he was offering. He swept aside all timid little hesitancies and questioning. High pressure stuff.

"Millions, boy!" he said and drove fist to palm. "You've played for big money. This is the biggest thing that ever—"

The telephone had been ringing, and now Mademoiselle Houlette knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Everhard.

The woman spoke hurriedly:

"Monsieur is called. A woman's voice says it is a matter of life and death!"

TO BE CONTINUED

The Raw Bronc

Unfinished Business

By GIL STRICK and ALAN LeMAY

Pasadena, California.

DEAR Mr. Strick:

A month ago in *Adventure* I read part of some stuff where you claimed you were going to tell how you break and train a cow horse, and you started out to tell how to "break him to stake." Just then the roan colt you were working on broke loose and ran down the fence, and it took you practically the whole article to catch him—I thought he was going to run right out of the story—and you never did get to breaking him to stake. It is no wonder the cattle business is constantly going broke.

Well, I have caught me a horse. Once and for all, are you going to write how to go on with this, or shall I get somebody else?

Yours truly,

—R. C. THOMAS

* * *

Santa Ysabel, California

Friend Thomas:

I sure am sorry this thing worked out that way. I didn't go to leave you standing there holding that colt. But after all, he had to learn to be held sometime, didn't he? And now just what do you mean by that crack about the cattle business going broke?

As to this thing of breaking your bronc to stake, like I started to say, I'll tell you what you do:

The first thing is to get a halter on him; and to show you how that goes, I will just go on and tell you how I came out with that same roan colt we was talking about.

I got a feller name of Charley to help me, and we went out to the corral and Charley dabbed his rope on the roan, and dallied to his saddle horn. There was a short sharp struggle, such as you are already familiar with if you have caught your colt like you say. And when the dust cleared away the roan bronc was seen to be standing braced backward against the end of the rope with an outraged look on his face; except that this roan mustang had turned out to be somewhat cross-eyed in moments of rage and alarm, like now.

I took halter in hand and slid toward him along the rope. On the first try I got to within about six feet of his nose;

when suddenly, having plunged backward fifty or sixty times without helping himself any, he tried a new system; and this time plunged my way, and come at me like he had been shot in the belly with a pack saddle. If anything like this should happen to you, Mr. Thomas, this is your cue to leap lightly aside. Or anyway, leap. But try to do better than I done, for I regret to say that on the impulse of the moment it seemed like I must have leaped straight up in the air. Almost any direction of leap would have done better than up or down; but we all make mistakes, and I had to make the best of it.

Casually taking a position flat on my back, I was very much interested to see a flurry of hoofs pass overhead; and while there are many interesting angles to watching a running horse from the underneath side, it is not a thing you care for very long or often, and I was glad to be on my feet again in time to see a little experiment the mustang was making with Charley.

It seems that right after running over the top side of me the roan bronc ran close past Charley's horse, loping it out like a scalded cat. Just as I looked around, a thousand pounds of roan mustang was fixing to hit the end of Charley's riata—and you couldn't tell if the fog he was raising was dust or smoke. There was a loud pop, followed by a little bang—Charley's latigo had busted.

I now saw a look of surprise come over the faces of the different horses, but nothing like the surprise that come over Charley, as Charley and his saddle now left the back of Charley's horse; and methodically, but without any loss of time to speak of, took off in a graceful sweeping curve, very much like a turkey sailing over a fence.

Charley and his saddle made a fairly good pancake landing, bounced vigorously two or three times, and taxied swiftly the length of the corral, and out the gate and down the road, forty feet of rope behind the roan bronc. I leaned sadly against the corral fence, starting to roll a cigaret and pondering on the sins of the world. And away they went.

Now, you know Charley was making a pretty good ride? Sometimes he would get his feet under him—they was still in the stirrups—and go loping along a little way at the end of the rope, taking steps anyway from one to two rods long. And again he would just go calmly scooting along the ground, a big trail of dust going up from the furrow he was making with his saddle. And the way he hollered at that roan, you'd have thought he laid an egg.

WELL, I'm sorry to say a thing like that can't last forever; and finally the bronc wound up in the corner of the fence, and Charley got loose from his saddle, and I got me another horse, and picked up saddle, rope and bronc. Charley was looking overheated, but very modest, not seeming to see anything wonderful or remarkable in this achievement he had put over; and though I tried to congratulate him on making a ride such as I would have said could not be done, you would have been surprised the way he took it. But I noticed one thing—the next time we went up to the bronc, Charley treated him with every mark of respect, as if he had never fully appreciated the possibilities of this roan before.

Well, you'll have to excuse me—I did not really start out to tell you how to break Charley to stake. After all, we are trying to break this bronc, and I swear I will get to him in a minute.

Just to show he was not licked yet, Charley now got on the horse I had brought out; and this time he choked that big roan colt down good and plenty. Pretty quick the roan flops over, and with him on the ground I had no more trouble getting the halter on—or at least no more trouble than could be overcome by a persistent man.

In a minute or two he was on his feet again, this time with the halter on, and

looking slightly squelched, but not at all fixed to cooperate.

Charley now set out to lead the roan to the staking ground, that is, the flat place in the world where we had figured we would start the colt in the ways of righteousness. Now this horse I had brought out for Charley was named Stud Goose—he was a partner of Bacon Rind, the horse I rode that other time; and though maybe you think it is kind of peculiar for a horse to be named Stud Goose, I want to tell you that is nothing to what he was named before Charley got through. For to tell you the truth, he could not pull a woodtick out of a can of lard; and after four or five minutes of leading the roan bronc to the staking ground, it seemed like they was still in the same place where they started from, except that the roan had gained eight feet.

Charley allowed he would either lead that roan to the staking ground or bust out crying. With the saddle dragging well back on the hips, and raking his horse from stem to stern, Charley went at it. Stud Goose laid into it with a final kind of supreme effort and, with legs working like battering rams, went tearing over the ground, taking the roan toward the staking ground at the rate of maybe two miles an hour, at a liberal guess. And along came the roan, sometimes sitting down but going forward, and sometimes pointed the other way and moving backward, and sometimes he was going along on his back, until I sure thought we was going to have to put roller skates on him to get him there; but he came.

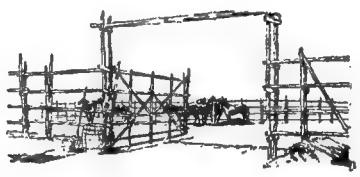
Well, what I started to say, we now fixed the rope around his neck with a bowline knot, such as would not draw up, and ran the rope through the halter, fixing it at the halter ring with a single knot; and we tied the other end of the rope to a sizable log. And now we threw a hat under him and let him figure it out for himself, for as far as we was concerned, we was practically done, and just about ready to go back to the cookhouse for something to eat, which we needed. We gave him two or three scares, to let him find out how long the rope was and how heavy the log was on the end of it; and that done, we went on back and left the roan to think that one over.

Next morning we went out and we led him to water a couple of times, the roan not caring for anything the first time, but thinking better of it later; and after that we turned him around a few times, this way and that, and led him on back; and after about a week of this he was leading pretty good, and we don't plan to have any more trouble under this head. After all, to make him lead good is the whole object of breaking him to stake, and with this done we can pass on to something else.

I was going to put in something here about the case of the spotted lizard that ran up the leg of the Cocopah Indian, just after he had seen the witch doctor; but I see I have no more room. So I'll just say, Mr. Thomas, for gosh sakes, quit this standing around like a dummy and get to breaking this horse. How do you expect ever to get anywhere if you don't show any more ambition with your home work than you have come out with so far?

Yours with best hopes,

—GIL STRICK



A Story of Japan

A SNITCH *in* TIME

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

DAVE ROOK met Strawber quite by accident—a bad accident, he decided some twenty-four hours later. Dave had just spent an hour professionally among the evening crowd of commuters in San Francisco's Ferry Building. He had emerged empty handed. His mind was not on his work. He was homesick for New York and Chatham Square. He would go back. But in the meantime he would seek a free lunch.

Dave wandered along the Embarcadero, street of docks, ship chandlers, and bars cleverly hidden from keen eyed dry agents by swinging doors and heavily leaded, colored glass windows. He pushed through a pair of swinging doors and saw Sebastian Strawber. It would have been hard to miss him. The clientele of this particular bar was composed largely of seafaring men, and Sebastian Strawber's winged collar was as unexpected in that line of flannel and denim shirts as the scent of roses in a barnyard.

Strawber was a small, nervous man with sharp, terrier-like features and a keen glance, with quick movements but a suave voice. His cuffs were slightly frayed, but a stone in the center of his bulging red cravat gave off what appeared to be authentic sparkles. He nodded in friendly greeting when Dave Rook appeared.

"Howdy," he said. "Have a drink?"

"Them's civilized words," said Dave. "You from New Yawk?"

Strawber nodded as he raised two fingers to the bartender.

"From New York," he replied, "and London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Cairo, Bombay, Shanghai, *and* Tokyo. Lived in all of 'em, been run out of most."

"That's lots of geography," said Dave, eyeing two steins quietly exuding foam that overflowed to the bar, "but there's no place like New Yawk." He reached for one of the steins. "Here's how."

Strawber raised the other stein.

"Looking at you," he said, his eyes acting accordingly.

He was carefully noting the details of Dave Rook's bulging figure: his broad though slightly stooped shoulders, his round, somewhat flabby face, the shadow of a frown that continually puckered his narrow brow as though to indicate that he thought the world a great puzzle, but didn't consider the solution of great importance.

Dave, in the meantime, was eyeing with interest a gold watch-chain stretched across Strawber's pearl-gray vest. For Dave, although he had a build like a weight lifter, actually lifted nothing heavier than watches. He did it without rancor or remorse. Had he been capable of the necessary cogitation, he would undoubtedly have considered himself something of a practising Communist. Gold watches were a luxury, representing, like as not, unearned increment. It was his duty to redistribute this unfairly divided wealth.

Although Dave was acknowledged to have great technical skill, he was considered by his colleagues to be totally devoid of business sense. Some even omitted the qualifying adjective. The men he had worked with during his apprenticeship, following a circus, had all gone on to higher things. Some had saved enough money to reform. Others had gone into politics. Only Dave Rook, at thirty-three, was still living from pocket to hand to mouth. He worked the subway during the rush hours for just enough to live on cheaply in Chatham Square; nothing laid by for a hard Winter or a dry Summer, but he wasn't ambitious as long as he could remain in New York. He was forced to leave the city of his heart through a professional error.

He had come home hurriedly after a hard day's work—hard because his unconscious benefactor had scrutinized him closely before he could lose himself in the Times Square crowd. Those keen eyes, alert beneath bushy brows, were the sort of eyes that would be likely to identify him at the lineup in Center Street some morning. Consequently, when he got to his room and examined his loot—a wafer-thin timepiece with more jewels than a Hindu rajah—he broke out in a cold sweat at the sight of the inscription. Engraved on the case he read:

> To Deputy Inspector Timothy Gilligan, on the occasion of his 20th Anniversary of joining the Force, from his pals of the Detective Bureau.

After mailing the watch back to the deputy inspector, Dave immediately went to California for the Winter.

The first day of Spring found him in San Francisco, as impecunious as ever, a stein of needled beer in his right hand, his left itching for the feel of Sebastian Strawber's watch-chain.

STRAWBER put down his empty stein with an abrupt movement that made a moist, smacking sound on the mahogany bar. An expression of ill-suppressed excitement quivered about the corners of his mouth. He stared at Rook with even greater insistence.

"Remarkable!" he exclaimed softly, as though talking to himself. "Remarkable resemblance. Unless it could be—No, it couldn't be. You don't happen to be an athlete, do you, Mister, ah—?"

"Rook," said Dave. "Dave Rook. No, I guess you wouldn't call me a athalete, exactly."

"Remarkable, just the same," said Se-

bastian Strawber. "Would you mind looking this way a little? There. Perfect. Even the profile! You— Did you ever play baseball?"

"Never," said Dave Rook, half preoccupied.

"Great game, baseball," said Strawber. "It's remarkable how the game has spread to foreign countries. Take Japan, for instance. I was forced to leave Japan only a short time ago, under unusual circumstances which would only bore you. Now Japan is baseball crazy. The kids play on vacant lots. The grownups root for their own teams and follow American games. They know the names of Big League players better than you or I, Mr. Rook. Have another drink?"

"Sure," said Dave, regaining interest.

"Wonderful little country, Japan," said Sebastian Strawber enthusiastically. "You should see it."

"Not me," said Dave. "I got a bellyful of these foreign places for awhile. I been three months in California and Tijuana. You can't get me back to Manhattan any too soon."

Strawber was suddenly very grave. He sipped his beer thoughtfully for a moment. Then his terrier-like enthusiasm returned.

"Why don't you go to New York by boat?" he asked.

"Haven't got the price," said Dave.

"I'm just the man you're looking for!" exclaimed Strawber, slapping Dave on the back. "I can get you aboard deadhead. I know a mate on a ship— Have another drink— Jerry, two more of the same." He drew his wallet and extracted a last bill which he tossed to the bar. "Wait here, Dave. Mind if I call you Dave? I'll be right back. I want to find out about that ship."

Ten minutes later he returned, brisk and beaming, to slap Dave on the back. Dave did not find his enthusiasm contagious. On the contrary, he felt rather glum as he noted that the gold watchchain no longer stretched across the pearl-gray vest. The sparkle had gone from the center of the red cravat.

"Well, old pal," said Sebastian Strawber, "we sail tonight. I've decided to go with you. And it won't cost us a cent. Have a drink."

He drew forth his wallet. Dave noticed that it contained greenbacks once more. A tenspot fluttered to the floor, unseen by Strawber as he paid for the drinks. Dave put his foot on the bill. He looked at Strawber for a moment, then stooped, picked up the money and handed it to his companion.

"You dropped something," he said.

They had numerous more drinks before Strawber led the way out of the bar over the now slightly undulating pavement of the Embarcadero. The dock lights across the way seemed strangely blurred and unsteady. Dave followed blindly, remembered in a vague way walking softly through dark places and climbing some impossible rope. He had a final impression of Strawber pulling the canvas cover half off a lifeboat, pushing him in, climbing in after him and trying to rearrange the canvas from inside.

When Dave reemerged into consciousness he was immediately aware of sensations of partial suffocation, great nausea and a painful cramping of all his extremities. He struggled to remove the plug from a keg marked "S.S. *Astola*, San Francisco." The effort caused increased agony. He poked his head into the fresh air. Before Strawber could pull him back into hiding, Dave had looked upon the foam streaked face of a gray and angry sea, and the tobacco streaked face of a red and angry boatswain.

In record time the two stowaways were given dungarees, work to do and an insight into what appeared a limitless vocabulary of profanity employed by the boatswain. The prospect of manual labor would have appalled Dave, had he not been too seasick to realize what was going on. Two hours after his discovery he was found curled up behind a ventilator cowl, a suiji rag in one

limp hand, an expression of intense misery on his greenish face. The boatswain applied foot pressure intermittently to one end of Dave's spinal column until he opened his eyes.

"On yer pins!" ordered the boatswain. "You may as well like it. You got twenty-two days more of it."

"Twenty-two days!" groaned Dave. "Does it take that long to get to New Yawk?"

"New York!" exclaimed the boatswain, spitting into the flooded scuppers. "Who the hell's going to New York. This ship's bound west fer Yokohama."

Dave Rook had a violent cardiac contraction, a sinking spell and a barely controllable desire to gallop around the deck beating his hands against his sides and neighing like a horse. Actually, all feelings and emotions were subjugated by a gagging and retching disturbance in his gullet. He was even oblivious of the boatswain's profanity as he pulled him away from the windward rail.

Strawber evinced great surprise when Dave informed him later that the ship was bound for Yokohama instead of New York, but he took it all philosophically enough.

"Remarkable!" he said quietly. "First time I was ever so tight that I stowed away on the wrong boat. Oh, well, Japan's a wonderful little country."

Before night he had talked himself into a comparatively soft job in the galley.

ON THE eve of the S.S. *Astola's* arrival at Yokohama, when the faint smell of wood smoke proclaimed a land breeze and the lights of Katsuura flashed in the horizon murk off the starboard bow, Dave Rook declared that he had sufficient maritime experience to last a lifetime. Another week of this nightmare with the quick footed boatswain and his thighs would be permanently black and blue. He wondered if the unaccustomed callouses on his hands would interfere with the exercise of his profession. At any rate, he told Strawber that he was going to jump ship in Yokohama, even if he were shot in the attempt.

"Leave everything to me," said Strawber. "I think I can get you ashore. And I have friends in Yokohama who can take good care of us until I swing a certain proposition."

"Proposition?" Rook faced Strawber with an expression of sudden elucidation replacing his usual frown of a puzzled child. "Say, that's been your game from the start! You got us on this ship on purpose—"

"What an idea!" protested Sebastian Strawber with a wave of his small hands, slightly chapped by three weeks of washing dishes. "But now that we are here, even though by mistake, we must think of getting home, must we not? And with profit, if possible."

"I guess so," agreed Rook, the lucid expression fading.

Twenty-four hours later Strawber made good his promise. The two stowaways were ashore, walking furtively down a dark street back of Yokohama's waterfront. Strawber loaded Rook into a rickshaw, climbed into one himself and gave an address. Rook felt himself whisked along in strange silence, broken only by the pat of the *kurumaya's* canvas-shod feet. The street was dark, except for a paper lantern dangling behind a bicycle here, the soft glow of light through the paper walls of a house there. The wail of a bamboo flute rose and died. An oily smell exuded from behind the blue cloth portières of an eel restaurant. The *kurumaya* shortened his steps, leaned back, stiffened his feet and put down the shafts of his vehicle so abruptly that Rook nearly pitched out head first.

A moment later he was sitting on the edge of a low, matting covered platform, while men and women in kimonos buzzed obsequiously about, making much verbal fuss over the beaming Strawber. Strawber was generous with

what appeared to be his only Japanese phrase:

"*Komban-wa—komban-wa—*"

Two glossy haired girls with their faces powdered lavender knelt to unlace Dave's shoes.

Dave looked at Strawber in alarm.

"Say, what kind of a joint is this?" he demanded.

"Quite all right. Let her take your shoes off," said Strawber, adding a word of explanation about the customs of the country.

He continued to explain later, when the two men were alone in a tiny room, bare of furnishings except for a pumpkin shaped brazier of porcelain, half full of ashes, on which a cast iron teapot simmered over a handful of glowing charcoal. A golden dragon was laughing himself into convulsions on a black lacquer panel that hung in a small alcove. Dave Rook muttered to himself as he examined the sliding paper screens that served as door to the room. There was no way of fastening them shut. He said something about stopping up the holes in the paper with postage stamps. His eyes grew round when a *neisan* entered to spread padded quilts upon the matting floor. He was speechless as he watched her lay out two padded sleeping kimonos.

"Can't we sport a room with a bed in it?" he inquired after the maid had gone.

"These people never use beds," Strawber replied. "But you'll find their sleeping customs quite satisfactory. If only they would use a little better quality gravel in these sacks they give us for pillows. However, give it a trial. Just slip into this kimono."

"To think that Dave Rook would be wearing ladies' clothes!" muttered Dave, shaking his head incredulously

He slept soundly, however. He was awakened by daylight shining through the paper screen and the sound of voices in his ear. He was surprised at first to find himself lying on the floor, and the clarity of a dozen conversations resounding through the flimsy walls and screens gave him the impression that he had been sleeping in public. He looked up to see Sebastian Strawber standing beside him, already dressed.

At the same moment the paper *shoji* slid back to reveal a kneeling *neisan* who touched her glossy head to the matting and made a brief speech.

"What's she want?" asked Dave, pulling his kimono about him sheepishly.

"It's about your bath," said Strawber, who had recognized the one word *furo*. "Go with her and take your bath."

"I don't need no bath," said Rook.

"It's the custom," said Strawber. "They'll be offended if you don't take a bath."

"But I can't make no public appearances in this ladies' neglijay—"

"Go on and take your bath. I have a couple of extremely important business calls to make and I want you all dressed and ready when I get back. Don't keep the girl waiting."

Dave hugged his kimono about him. Designed for short Japanese, the garment came only to his large, bony knees. He followed the Japanese maid down a drafty corridor, padded down steep, slippery steps in his bare feet, skirted a little garden in a courtyard. At the end of another drafty corridor, the *neisan* slid back a screen and clouds of steam rolled forth. She pointed to a basket on the floor and said—

"*Kudasai.*"

"Could you what?" demanded Rook.

The girl tugged at the front of his kimono. Rook hugged himself tighter and blushed.

"I get you," he said. "But wait a minute."

He stepped boldly through the steam, slid the screen almost closed, then handed the kimono around the corner.

He turned to survey the interior of the bathroom. The steam was arising from what appeared to be a large and deep packing case in one corner of the room. Hot water was trickling into this box through a wooden trough. On the

floor were several wooden stools and four small wooden buckets full of water. Dave Rook stood for perhaps five minutes, staring at the layout, wondering just how one went about bathing one's self with the paraphernalia at hand. The stools seemed too small for an adult to sit on. The buckets were scarcely large enough to hold one of his feet. The packing case must be the bathtub. There were two wooden steps up the side for help in climbing in.

He went up the steps, nonchalantly slipped into the water and sat down up to his neck. He gasped. The water was scalding. He tried to get out immediately, but could get no leverage. His knees were under his chin. He reached out his hands to grasp the wooden sides of the bathtub. He started to pull himself to a standing position.

At that instant the screen slid back and the powdered face of the *neisan* appeared like a lavender phantom in the steam.

Dave released his grip and sat down again.

"Get out!" he ordered.

The *neisan* made a short speech.

"Get out!" Dave Rook was being slowly boiled.

"O-kyaku-san orimasu," said the maid.

"All right, all right!" cried Rook, nodding and gesticulating frantically in an effort to convey the idea that he would agree to anything if she would only retire and leave him in privacy.

He apparently made himself understood, for the *neisan* disappeared, leaving the *shoji* generously ajar.

With a bound, Rook emerged from the wooden cauldron. His steaming skin was as red as a spanked baby's, as he pranced across the room to pull the screen closed. There was no way of fastening it, of course. He turned, dipped his toe into one of the wooden buckets, found the water cool and poured it over himself. He sighed, as though to thank heaven for small favors.

He started as he heard voices behind the *shoji*. They seemed to be approaching. He looked around for a towel. There was none in sight. He gave another hopeless glance at the screen, as though he thought a lock might have grown there miraculously in the last ten seconds. He recognized the voice of the *neisan* saying—

"Koko-ni arimasu."

He heard the *shoji* rattle as some one prepared to push it open. Panic stricken, with no alternative apparent, he leaped back into the packing case full of hot water. He swore to himself.

The *shoji* opened.

"O-kyaku-san," announced the *neisan.*

WITH no little dismay, Rook saw what appeared to be a crowd behind the maid. They were Japanese men—six, seven, eight of them pushed past her to enter the steamy room. They were all short and all but one wore a kimono. Some were carrying bulky cameras and tripods. The one man dressed in Occidental clothes, a dwarf with oversized trousers draped upon his bowed legs and sixteen short black hairs on his chin, raised his hand containing a derby hat and exclaimed—

"Tsuree cheeyas fo' Baybo Roos!"

Whereupon the other Japanese put down their cameras and tripods and clapped their hands earnestly.

"Gents," pleaded Rook, "I don't savvy your lingo, so I can't catch the drift of what you're driving at. But if any of you can understand the good old American language, for the love of Pete please back outa this joint and give me a chance to crawl off the stove before my skin cooks loose."

The man with the derby looked puzzled. The others were busy setting up their cameras. A flashlight went off in a puff of white flame and smoke. Another flared.

"Have a heart, gents!" Rook pleaded.

The man with the bulky trousers and

derby hat stepped forward.

"Have you seen Japanese basebawru games?" he inquired.

"Please, gents," said Rook.

The man with the derby inserted his forefinger into the water in which Rook was stewing.

"Japanese take bass quite hot," he commented. "Maybe hot bass not so good for home run. Do you taking hot bass in America befoah games?"

Another man had produced a baseball from the sleeve of his kimono and handed it to the interpreter with a Japanese plea.

"Prease to write youah quite famous name on basebawru," said the man with the derby, extending the ball and a pencil, "first showing how same is retained by hand in pitching."

"Listen—" Rook made a gesture of desperation with two very red hands. He talked slowly and very loudly, as though the volume of his voice would aid his listeners to understand. "You get me towel. See? Towel. Then go. Upstairs—my room. Wait upstairs."

"You can maybe exprain which team should win American Reague pennant?"

"Anything," said Rook. "But upstairs."

Another flash went off. The man in the derby translated. The man with the baseball replaced it in his kimono sleeve. The delegation disappeared. The *nei-san* brought a towel as large as a pocket handkerchief, and Rook was left in a state of slightly bewildered, slightly scalded solitude.

The delegation was waiting for him in his room. It seemed to have grown in numbers. The delegates watched him with frank curiosity as he dressed. The derby hatted spokesman continued to ask questions about baseball. Two more visitors entered while Rook was buttoning his shirt.

"Where do they all come from?" asked Rook.

"Is quite crowd in street," the spokesman explained, "hoping to shee you; maybe hifty, maybe one hundred men."

"The hell you say!" exclaimed Rook, knotting his tie. "I wonder why."

Then Sebastian Strawber, out of breath, made a brisk entry. In thirty seconds he had cleared the room with staccato explanations and a promise of a later engagement.

"I was hoping to get here before the gang," he said, when he was alone with Rook, "but I was delayed, and these Japanese newspaper boys are very enterprising. And I suppose you've jimmied everything."

"I haven't jimmied nothing," said Rook. "The people here are damned neighborly. Too damned friendly, in fact. They call on a guy when he's taking a bath. I had to sit in a box of boiling water till I damn near lost my hide, while the neighbors dropped in to take souvenir photos and talk. Say, they sure are nuts about baseball. That's all they talked about. And they had a hard time pronouncing my name. They can't say Dave Rook. They call it Babe Ruth—"

"And you kept correcting them?"

"Sure," said Rook.

"Oh, well, there's no harm done," said Strawber, a little sadly. "They'd expect you to deny it. I told 'em you were traveling incognito."

"In what?"

"I told the newspapers you were Babe Ruth, here on the quiet to study Japanese life and customs, and hiding out in little Japanese inns to avoid the fuss of being recognized."

"You told people I was Babe Ruth, the slugger?"

"You look enough like him to be his twin."

"But that ain't right," protested Dave Rook. "Babe Ruth must be about ready to go to training camp. They'll read about that in the papers."

"Papers from the States get here three weeks late," said Strawber. "Of course, after the news of your official receptions and exhibition games get cabled to the States, we'll probably get denials and injunctions in reply, and there'll be

all sorts of hell raised. But that won't be for a few days yet. Before then, we'll make our stake and skip."

"Who's going to play in these exhibition games?" demanded Rook.

"You are," said Strawber. "Tomorrow you play the first of a five-game series as guest star with the Osaka Samurai."

"But I never played ball in my life!" said Rook.

"You got until tomorrow to get the hang of the game," said Strawber. "This evening you will be guest of honor at a banquet of the Society for the Propagation of Sports, Bicycle Racing and Healthful Exercises. Tonight you will speak over the radio. Tomorrow morning you will autograph baseballs. At eleven o'clock you will give an exhibition of home run hitting at Waseda University. At lunch you will be guest of the Tokyo Teikoku Daigako baseball team. In the afternoon you play with Osaka against Hakodate. Tomorrow night—"

"Say, listen," Rook interrupted. "I can't pull a stunt like that. It ain't square. I never in my life got mixed up in a skin game. Besides, I'll look like an awful boob out there on the ball field."

"It shouldn't be hard for you," argued Strawber. "Besides, what do you care as long as you get paid. I'm asking a guarantee of ten thousand yen for your appearance, to coax you out of your incognito. The Society for the Propagation of Sports is going to put up the money in advance. They're going to pay tonight."

"How much money is ten thousand yen?"

"Five thousand dollars," said Strawber.

"That's quite a few dollars," mused Rook. "Still, it's way outside my line. By the way, all these guys that came to see me this morning was dressed up in these here ladies' neglijays. Don't men ever wear no clothes in this town?"

"The kimono," explained Sebastian Strawber, "is the national costume of Japan. You probably won't see a dozen Japanese men wearing Western clothes in all your stay."

"But I don't see no pockets in these damn kimono things," said Rook plaintively. "Where the hell would a Jap carry his watch, then?"

"Why don't you worry about something useful?" asked Strawber, pulling a paper from his pocket. "Here. Here's the local newspaper in English. Look at the pictures."

"Why the pictures? Say, I can read," said Rook. He rustled the pages with the dexterity of a subway reader. "Somebody's torn a piece out of this sheet," he went on. "And it looks like the only piece in the paper I'd want to read. There's a piece torn out of the shipping news page that looks like it might have been the list of ships sailing for the States."

Strawber snatched the paper impatiently, refolded the pages and handed it to Rook again.

"Here," he said. "Read the sports so you can talk about something at that banquet tonight."

THE banquet was held in a Japanese restaurant and was to be a native style meal, since the great Ruth was supposed to be studying local life and customs. Before dinner bowls of thick, bright green ceremonial tea were served in a room of which the walls were lined with huge wreaths of artificial flowers, propped up on easels and bearing placards announcing that Babe Ruth, the Home Run King, was being welcomed to Japan by numerous persons and societies.

Dave Rook was first presented to Takayama Neguro, Honorary President of the Society for the Propagation of Sports, Bicycle Racing and Healthful Exercises. The president had the general paunchy contours of Hotei, God of Plenty; the polish of his bronzed scalp shone through a translucent, peach-like

fuzz; his narrow eyes disappeared when he smiled, and he was usually smiling to display a brilliant mouthful of gold teeth. In honor of the distinguished visitor from overseas he was wearing what some one had told him was a suit of American clothes. A low collar, five sizes too large, hung about his throat like a necklace. His vest, which rippled down his ample front in concentric folds, was crossed by a heavy watchchain.

The Japanese with the derby and the sixteen black hairs on his chin was present to act as interpreter, but Takayama let him talk only after he himself had made use of his own English, which consisted of two phrases, repeated at frequent intervals with much golden smiling.

While Dave Rook was the center of curious questioning and frank examination of his person and attire by the guests, Sebastian Strawber managed to get Takayama and the interpreter aside.

"Sorry to bring up business at this social function," he said to the interpreter, "but tell Mr. Takayama that there's that little matter of Mr. Ruth's guarantee. It was to be paid tonight."

"Tsank you," interrupted Takayama, smiling.

"Now, about the cash," said Strawber, before the interpreter had said a word. "I think I explained that the reason I wanted currency was not that we doubt the honor of credit of the Society. Personally, I prefer a check. However, this is one of Mr. Ruth's idiosyncracies. Baseball players are superstitious, and one of his superstitions is never to accept a check."

"Tsank you," said Takayama with a bow.

At last the interpreter got into action. Takayama fumbled in his inside pocket with fat fingers. Then ten banknotes were counted into Strawber's hand. He cast a quick glance in the direction of Dave Rook, who did not seem to be looking. Strawber put the bank notes hurriedly into his wallet.

"Tsank you," said Takayama.

"Let me thank *you*," said Strawber.

He started to edge away when he was accosted by Dave Rook.

"Listen," said Dave. "These are all pretty good guys, when you get so you can tell what they're talking about. It seems a damn shame to take 'em. Can't we call off the swindle?"

"Don't get sentimental," said Strawber. "You want to get home, don't you?"

"Sure," said Dave, putting an arm around Strawber, "but think of the boob I'm going to look playing ball tomorrow. Have a heart—"

"Perhaps you can break an arm or something at the last minute," said Strawber. "But hold up your end tonight, at least."

"Did they pay you the jack?" asked Dave.

Strawber looked around for Takayama. He was across the room.

"Not yet," said Strawber. "They pay us tonight after the banquet."

The banquet started. The guests squatted in line on the matting floor, behind tiny, foot-high tables. Rook and Strawber squatted on one side of Takayama. The interpreter squatted on the other. *Neisans*, their bright kimonos secured by gay bows that covered their whole backs, knelt to scoop rice from lacquered tubs. There was much noisy sipping of tea and crunching of odorous, yellow, pickled radishes.

Half an hour later, while Rook was looking askance at seaweed in a lacquered cup and poking his chopsticks gingerly into grilled eels in a lacquered box, Strawber drew a handkerchief from his pocket. A piece of paper fluttered to the floor. Strawber blew his nose, replaced his handkerchief and said in the general direction of the interpreter:

"Pardon me for appearing rude, but I have just remembered a cablegram which I must send. It is urgent. I will be right back."

He arose. Rook uncrossed his legs, preparatory to following.

"Mr. Ruth will remain to represent

me during my short absence," said Strawber.

Rook crossed his legs again. Strawber made his exit.

Rook picked up the paper that had fluttered from Strawber's pocket. It was a newspaper clipping. Rook read:

> Sailing tonight: *Astola*, for San Francisco direct. Tomorrow, *Porthos* for Marseilles via ports. Thursday, *Yamashiro-maru* for Shanghai. Friday, *President* for San Francisco via ports . . .

He leaned toward Tayakama as though he were going to whisper something confidential in his ear.

"Strawber's a nice guy," said Rook.

"Tsank you," said Takayama.

"You're quite a card yourself," said Rook, slipping his arm around the president's shoulders. "I like you."

"How do do," said Takayama, beaming.

"And listen," said Rook, continuing his manual manifestations of great affection, "how far is it to that cable office where Strawber went?"

"Tsank you," said Takayama.

"No, listen," said Rook, raising his voice, the better to be understood. "How far—cable office—how far?"

Takayama smiled again and nodded wisely.

"How far?" Rook was on the verge of shouting.

The interpreter came to life.

"Ah, office?" he said. "Quite neeyah from this prace. Go down shix streets, go left tsuree streets—"

A sudden explosion from Takayama interrupted his directions. The portly President of the Society for the Propagation of Sports, Bicycle Racing and Healthful Exercises had turned deep red in the face. He was expostulating violently, his voice rising from guttural to falsetto tones, like an actor at the Kabuki-za. He slapped his vest repeatedly as he vented on the interpreter what was quite apparently high indignation.

"The old gent swallow a bone?" inquired Rook, when Takayama stopped for breath.

"Not bone," said the interpreter. "Takayama-san just now discovah he has lost watch."

"That's too bad," said Rook, arising. "Well, I better be getting over to that cable office. I just thought of something that my friend Strawber ought to add to that cable he's sending."

"Somebody can show you which way—"

"Don't bother," said Rook. "I got your directions plain."

"No bahzah—"

"Honest, I don't need nobody," said Rook. "I'll be back before you get around to the pie and ice cream. Me and Strawber'll be back together."

He was edging away. He turned suddenly and walked quickly across the room. He found a door and followed a corridor. He looked behind him nervously. He went out another door and found himself in the street.

A SCORE of kimono-clad men and a dozen or more in the dark uniforms and caps of college students were standing outside. When Rook appeared, a shout went up. More men came around the corner, running with jerky steps as their toes gripped the cords of their wooden *geta*. The crowd surged toward Rook. Rook turned and fled.

For the moment he forgot he was theoretically Babe Ruth, hero of young Japan, subject of adulation, object of cheers and requests for autographs. He could not understand that the Japanese cries were shouts of approbation. He did not suspect that these men were running to get a close view of him, perhaps to touch him, to ask him questions in the English they had been compelled to learn in school. To him, this was a familiar scene. Many times before had he run before a yelling crowd. He increased his speed.

Thanks to the limitations of wooden clogs as running shoes, he had a good

lead. Some of the students, however, wearing European shoes, were several yards ahead of the pack of pursuers and promised a good race. Rook galloped over a bowed wooden bridge. At the far end a surprised policeman emerged from a sentry box.

Rook heard the *clop-clop* of wooden clogs on the bridge. He heard the leaders of the pursuit shout something to the policeman. He looked back. He saw the red light atop the sentry box reflected in the dark waters of a canal. He saw the policeman make a move as though to join in the chase.

Rook turned a corner, sprinted, turned another corner. He was running in a dark street. He darted into a black crevice between two paper houses. He stood a moment, panting and perspiring, hoping that the sounds of his quick breath would not betray him. When he heard his pursuers go by, he breathed deeply. He became aware of a fragrance, almost a taste, in the air. He drew another deep breath. He recognized the damp, salty smell of the sea. He must be near the waterfront . . .

He waited until the sounds of pursuit had died away. He was trying to remember the steamer sailings he had read in the clipping Strawber had dropped. He crept out cautiously. At the end of the dark street he could make out docks. He walked rapidly toward them, glancing in all directions. He skirted the waterfront, examining flags that drooped from each stern. He paused in front of an American flag and on the bulge of a stern made out the white letters: *Astola,* San Francisco.

He contemplated the heavy lines coming down from the stern to the mooring cleats. They were large, comfortable looking ropes. A man could get up them, in spite of the circular anti-rat shields. His particular end of the dock seemed deserted. All activity seemed concentrated forward, where the noise and confusion of loading seemed drawing to its conclusion. He could probably get over the stern unobserved.

Rook thought of the long nightmare of his trip over. His fingers tenderly and reminiscently touched sensitive regions below his hips. Another three weeks under the thumb and foot of the *Astola's* boatswain seemed beyond human endurance. A shudder ran through him. Then he thought of his present situation. He thought of himself as eating immense quantities of ham and eggs and French fried potatoes while the Second Avenue L roared overhead and the floor trembled with the rumbling of passing trucks. He straddled the hawser.

Once aboard, he lay in the bottom of a lifeboat for several hours. The rattle of winches had long since given way to the rhythmic throb of the engines. He felt the ship rocked by a gentle swell. There had been a lull, then the throbbing had begun again. On the trip over, Strawber had explained that it was safe to appear after this lull. There was no longer any chance of being put ashore with the pilot. Rook climbed out stiffly.

As his feet touched the deck, he saw a head pop out from under the canvas covering of a lifeboat farther forward. The body that followed the head was that of Sebastian Strawber. He did not see Rook until Rook seized his arm. He then seemed somewhat surprised and, for a brief moment, even embarrassed.

"Well!" was his only greeting.

"So you was going to run out on me, was you?" Rook began. "Going to leave me holding the bag—"

"Apparently you did not return to our hotel."

"What? Go back and risk having to take another one o' them baths? Not me!"

"I left word for you there," said Strawber. He had regained his composure. "I explained that the game was up and that I was getting the money out of the country, intending to share with you later . . ."

"Oh, I was going to get a slice, was I?" Rook asked facetiously.

"Well—" Strawber laughed nervously —"it sounds fishy, of course, but I haven't got the money any more. I lost it."

"Oh, you lost it, did you?"

"Not lost, exactly. I was frisked, very cleverly frisked. Some one took the bills right out of my wallet and left the wallet, so I wouldn't discover the loss immediately. I always said the Japanese were a remarkable people."

"What d'ya mean, Japanese?" protested Rook. "It was me took that roll off you."

"You—took the ten grand?"

"Sure," said Rook. "It was a neat job, even if it wasn't exactly in my line."

Sebastian Strawber looked immensely relieved. He put an arm around Rook's shoulder.

"Well, well!" he beamed. "You certainly gave me a scare with your little joke. Shall we split now?"

"Split nothing!" said Rook. "I took that roll off you, but I ain't got it no more."

"You mean you—you hid it somewhere, for safe keeping?"

"Hid it nothing!" exclaimed Rook. "I give it back to Taka-what's-his-name —you know, the old Japanese gent with the bay window."

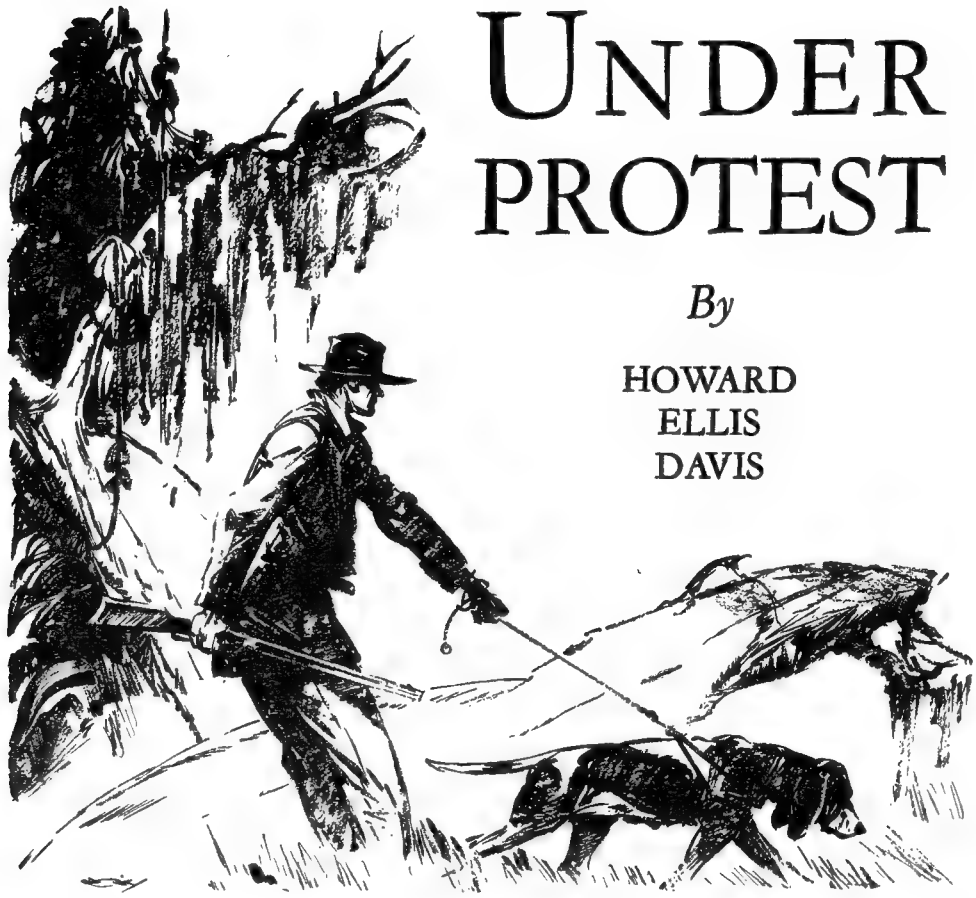
"You gave the ten thousand back to Takayama?"

"Sure," said Rook. "I didn't like that game we was pulling on the old bird. I didn't figure making a boob outa myself playing ball, so I thought I'd best give him back his ante and blow. I always say a fella ought to stick to his own line."

With a puff of pride Rook drew a watch and chain from his pocket. He let it dangle before his eyes. Almost immediately the expression of proud pleasure faded from his face.

"The pot-bellied old piker!" he exclaimed. "A dollar watch and a plated chain!"

With a movement of disgust, he twirled the watch above his head and let it fly. It made a distinct plop as it smacked into the red face of the boatswain, who at that moment appeared at the head of a companion ladder.



UNDER PROTEST

By

HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS

I WAS settin' out in front of my shack, leanin' back agin the log wall smokin' my pipe, when Buck Sapper, sheriff of the county, come a-gallopin' up like hell after a yearlin' an' stopped 'bout ten foot in front of me. The big roan's hoofs plowed up the ground as it set back on its haunches.

The world is full of men like Buck. In midstream, they ride the swiftest part of the current, twistin' an' turnin', bobbin' up an' down. Some of 'em go a far ways. But as I ease along in the eddy water, lettin' the hard things of life slide by, I now an' then come on a piece of broken drift that used to be one of them rip-snorters who had passed me by in sich a hurry.

My corn patch for bread an' a drap of likker; my cane patch for molasses; a good garden; a bunch of range critters an' hogs in the woods, to be drawed on when needed; my little hoss mule, September; my houn' dog, Belle; peace an' quiet an' a full belly is all I ask of life. An' one of the peacefullest times is settin' in front of my shack, Belle at my feet, the big red oak rustlin' overhead, the woods stretchin' out in front, leadin' gradually down to the big swamp, where the many colors of the trees would stump a artist to name.

"Light an' set," I says to Buck, easin' the pipestem from 'tween my lips. "You'll find the other chair inside. 'Scuse my not risin'."

"The bank at Wadeville has been robbed—plum' gutted of everything it had in it," Buck informs me, makin' no move to git off his hoss.

"Do tell!" I says. "Who done all that?"

"A lone bandit. He tied up the cashier an' Mr. Horton, the president. Mr. Horton jumped on him. Tore his mask off an' got a good look at his face. But the feller hit him over the head with a gun an' laid him out."

"Got plum' away, I reckin."

"They telephoned an' headed him off. But he shot his way out an' come this way, into this county."

"Anybody hurt?" I asked.

"Nope. He jest shot holes in the front tires of Tally Martin's auto an' outrun 'em. This mornin' his car was found wrecked an' abandoned near the edge of Hell Swamp."

"Po' critter," I says. "Ef he's in Hell Swamp he'll git lost an' starve to death."

"Tally Martin, the sheriff, some deppities an' Mr. Horton, the banker, are all over here," Buck informs me. "We're goin' to jine forces. Mr. Horton is offerin' a thousand dollars to the one who takes the robber an' recovers the bank money. It's a matter of pride for some of us in this here county to git that thousand."

"You always was prideful, Buck. But they tell me Tally Martin is a go-gitter himself. I don't know the man. But they say he is a plum' fire-eater."

"Fire-eater is right," Buck says. "Jest as soon kill you as look at you. An' he always gits his man."

"Better light an' rest awhile," I invited again. "I'll make some coffee."

"Rest, hell!" he snapped back at me. "I'm here to swear you in as a deppity, Luke."

The front legs of my chair come down with a thump. Astonished too much for speech, I set up straight an' looked at Buck.

"You know Hell Swamp like yo' own do' yard," he continued on. "Yo' houn' dog is a man-trailer. You're the best shot in Alabama."

Takin' the pipestem from my mouth, I looked Buck over an' says:

"Belle only trails niggers who have been in my melon patch. I find out who done the stealin', then go over an' collect, or let 'em work it out in the garden. Ef I'm a good shot, I didn't learn practisin' on human critters."

"Git yo' rifle an' git started, Luke," he orders me. "I want you to meet me on the ridge 'tween Gum Branch an' the swamp. An' for once in yo' life git a hustle on."

"Buck," I says, "ef this is yo' idee of a joke, it's a mighty po' one."

I leaned back in my chair an' puffed on my pipe, wishin' he'd ride on an' let me alone.

"You're already appinted a deppity, Luke. Git to movin'."

"I ain't a-goin' to be no deppity," I told him, firm-like. "I ain't goin' a-pokin' through the swamp an' have that there bank robber shoot my gizzard out. It ain't my money he's got. Besides, I'm tired. I been workin' in the garden for two hours. I was settin' here restin' when you rid up."

"You damned feather-legged skunk!" he biled at me, plum' losin' his temper. "I know you're a coward. I know you're so lazy it hurts you to draw breath. But ain't you got no pride?"

"No; I ain't got no pride," I told him.

"Do you want to go to jail?" he asked, sarcastic-like.

"Jail!" I replies. "I don't have no truck with jails. I ain't never seen the inside of one, an' mighty few on the outside. Why in hell would I want to go to jail?"

"That's where I'm a-goin' to take you ef you refuse to perform yo' appinted duty," he says to me, gittin' madder an' madder. "I'll handcuff you an' hog-tie you an' when I go back to town I'll take you an' lock you up. I'll arrest you for resistin' a officer of the law, disturbin' the peace an' refusin' duty in the face of gunfire. I'll lock you up an' keep you there till yo' lazy, no'count carcass rots."

Takin' out a pair of handcuffs, he shuck 'em at me.

"Buck," I says, risin' an' knockin' out my pipe, "I see you mean business."

"You're damn right I mean business," he snorted.

"I'm warnin' you that I'll make a mighty po' deppity," I put him on notice. "I'm scared 'fo' I ever git started. Besides, as I told you, I'm tired. It's too hot to be pokin' through the swamp on a day like this. Ef you had the brains of a squint eyed shoat, you'd know I ain't fitten for the job."

"Will you meet me on the ridge?" he asked, not havin' no consideration at all for my feelin's in the matter.

"Yep," I says, drawin' a deep breath, "I'll meet you there."

I TAKEN a short cut through the swamp. This here business sho went agin the grain. An' I could tell by the way Belle sneaked along behind me that she didn't like it neither. It was hot down there in the swamp, like I knowed it would be. I was sweatin', but mo' from nerviousness than the heat—a sort of cold sweat that kept breakin' out on my face as fast as I wiped it off on the sleeve of my shirt.

Then I seen Jim Pointer, one of Buck's deppities. He's one of Old Man Duke Pointer's boys, livin' jest this side of the county seat. They're nice folks, an' Jim's a nice boy.

"Belle," I says, breathin' a sigh of relief, "we amongst friends."

Standin' by a big poplar, Jim was gazin' straight ahead, as ef watchin' for somethin'. As I walked out on him, an' he heard the sound of my feet cracklin' through the dead leaves on the floor of the swamp, he whirled an' pinted a big .44 straight at my head. It scared me so bad that I drapped my rifle an' histed my hands, yellin' like a wildcat.

"Oh, it's you," he says, lowerin' his gun.

"No thanks to you that it ain't my corpse," I replies, pickin' up my rifle. "Is it Buck's orders to shoot everybody at sight?"

"No. But when you're watchin' for a desprit character an' a blunderin' fool comes walkin' up on you unbeknownst, he oughter git shot."

"I'm a deppity, same as you," I says, tremblin' all over; for my close escape at the hands of a friend had plum' give me the jerks. "An' I'm jest 'bout as nervious. I got to meet Buck over on the ridge; but ef I had knowed that there bandit feller was in this part of the swamp, I'd have gone around, even though it is three mile farther."

"We don't know jest where he is. Buck's waitin' for you 'fo' he starts a drive."

I tried to persuade Jim to go 'long with me; but, placin' his orders from Buck above the safety an' feelin's of a friend, he wouldn't leave his stand near the big poplar. As I crep' along through the swamp after that, I was mighty particular 'bout the noise I made, kase it was plain one of them nervious deppities was as dangerous as the bank robber. One would shoot you 'bout as quick as the other. An' then I found the clue.

I knowed it was a clue soon as I seed it layin' there on the ground—white piece of paper, clean an' fresh, showin' it had jest been drapped.

"Belle," I whispers to my houn' dog, stoppin' dead in my tracks, "that's a clue." First stedyin' the swamp in all directions to make sure the bank robber wasn't in sight, I walked around the clue, stedyin' hit. Then I picked it up an' smoothed it out. It had writin' on it; but as I ain't no good at readin' writin' what ain't printed, I let that go. When I had it right side up, though, I seen that the bank name was printed at the top. "B-a-n-k," I spelt it out, an' ef that don't spell bank it don't spell nothin'.

"Yes, Belle," I says, "this here is a clue, sho as hell."

It hadn't been no time since that there bank robber had helt the clue in his hand an' drapped it or cast it aside, I reasoned. He had passed this way, must be close in the neighborhood. In course the natural thing was to look for tracks, an' I soon found 'em, great big

number 'levens, pressed down deep in the soft earth of the swamp, showin' that a big man had been atop of 'em.

Gittin' down on my hands an' knees, I stedied 'em close.

"Belle," I whispers, "we'll go git Buck. This here is his funeral. I sho don't want it to be mine."

But after squattin' there over them tracks for awhile, thinkin' 'bout it, I decided different. The ornery cuss had called me a coward.

"Jest to prove that I'm not," I whispers to Belle, my teeth chatterin', "we'll go after this here bank robber ourselves. Ef I git a chance to shoot first, he'll be our meat. Ef he gits me, then Buck will know that my blood is on his head. He'll never git over it." It's funny what fool notions will git in a man's head when his feelin's has been hurt by a friend.

No Injun that ranged them swamps in days gone by ever crep' along as silent as me an' Belle as we followed them tracks. She's a silent trailer an', to keep her from runnin' ahead, I had fastened 'bout her neck the piece of rope I always carries in my pocket. Most places they was plain enough; but when a drift of leaves or a patch of grass was crossed, Belle snuffed along with no trouble at all. An' then we seen him!

Yep; there he was, plain as day, not mo'n fifty foot in front of us. He was a big man, a fierce lookin' man, a killin' lookin' man. His head was bare an' his shirt sleeves was rolled up, like he was all cocked an' primed for business. His black mustache seemed to bristle like the hairs on the spine of a mad razorback hog. A big gun was strapped to his side, an' in his hands was a sawed-off shotgun. Leanin' forward, his eyes ranged the swamp, an' he helt that there shotgun ready for action.

"There he is, Belle," I whispered, easin' down behind a big stump, "all ready to fill my carcass full of lomos at the first crack of a stick. But I ain't goin' to crack no stick."

An' I squatted there behind the stump, all drawed up as small as possible, a-jerkin' an' a-tremblin', my teeth knockin' together like I had the chills an' fever.

"Like I told that there fool sheriff, I ain't fitten for this sort of thing," I thought, when it was too late. "I ain't cut out that way. I ain't desprit enough."

Then I thought of a picture I had seen on the back of a magazine paper of a desprit man, an' of how he looked. He had a handkerchief draped over his face, an' his eyes peepin' over the top was somethin' awful to see. Untyin' the bandanna from 'round my neck, I knotted it behind my head.

I don't know why, but gittin' most of my face kivered up helped me pow'ful. I began to feel sort of a bad actor myself. Gittin' a good look at that there feller through the bushes in front, I eased the rifle to my shoulder an' taken a steady aim, quick but accurate.

In course the bullet hit right where I had pinted—the small part of the gun stock. He give a big jump, an' the shotgun come plum' in two pieces, so that he helt the stock in one hand an' the barrel part in the other.

I don't know whether it was the bandanna over my face or the breakin' of the strain; but I begun to cut up scan'lous. I've had somethin' of the same thing happen after slow-trailin' an old bear half a day, then puttin' a bullet into him. No Injun in the old times ever raised mo' hell as he rushed out to sculp his victim's head than I did after the crack of that there rifle shot.

My voice was high an' shrill as, the bandanna over my face, I come bilin' out from behind the stump, yellin' for him to put up his hands. Drappin' the pieces of the shotgun, he whirled to face me, his hand on the pistol butt. Shootin' from the hip, I opened a furrow through the hair on the side of his head. I could do this without no danger to him; but he didn't know it. His arms shot up like the pistons on a steam enjine.

I DIDN'T know at the time what I was a-sayin'; but thinkin' back on it, I know that I abused him, cussed him, called him hard names, threatened to kill him. I made him lay down on his belly an' helped him down with a kick on the seat of his pants. Snippin' off a piece of Belle's rope, I tied his hands together behind his back. Then, sort of up agin it as to what to do next, I jerked the bandanna from my face an' stuffed it into his mouth, gaggin' him so he couldn't make no sound 'cept a sort of rumblin' in his th'oat.

"Now git up an' git ahead of me," I ordered him.

"Called me a coward, did he?" I then said to myself. "Said I was so lazy it hurt me to draw breath. What'll he say when I come a-waltzin' out on the ridge an' present him with the bank robber? What'll Tally Martin, that there fire-eatin' sheriff from the next county, say?"

Addressin' the feller direct, I continued on—

"You mought rob banks an' put old antipated bank presidents out of business, when they tries to protect their sacred trust; but you run into a varmint of another stripe when you crossed up with Luke Tillworth."

Settin' up, he glared at me. Makin' mumblin' sounds, which account of the bandanna in his mouth didn't have no words to 'em, he shuck his head. He growed so red in the face I thought his blood vessel would bust. But he wouldn't git on his feet. No, sir! Jest set there, takin' on.

I threatened everything, from buildin' a fire under him to shootin' him where he set; but it didn't do no good. An' I couldn't shoulder no two hundred an' forty pound critter an' tote him out the swamp. But I did drag him a piece. Tyin' his feet together, I leaned my rifle agin a tree, taken him under the armpits an' drug him. Then I'd stop to rest, move my rifle up an' drag him some mo'. I hadn't worked so hard in many a day an', from sliding through the muddy places, he begun to look like a log that has been snaked out the swamp by a yoke of steers.

Settin' down on a stump, I fanned myself with my hat. The excitemint had all oozed out of me. I was in a plum' sober frame of mind. It wasn't so far up to the ridge where Buck was waitin' for me; so, though it was agin the grain to ask anything of him, I decided to go for help. Leavin' him settin' there, mumblin' at me, I sot out.

I don't know why I seen the next feller 'fo' he seen me, for I wasn't takin' no particular pains to walk quiet. Maybe it was kase I was follerin' the run of a creek an' the swamp was grassy, without many dead leaves layin' about. Of a sudden I seen him ahead of me, a thin young feller with a cap on. A automatic in his hand, he was lookin' in the other direction, an' I could tell he was all keyed up. Decidin' not to take no chances of gettin' shot by another nervious depitty, I hailed him—

"Hey, bud!"

Like I had jabbed him from behind, he whirled about, an' the muzzle of that there automatic come with him. I could see he was a-goin' to shoot, an' shoot to kill. It taken quick action an' a big chance; but I had to do it. It's a wonder I didn't blow his hand off. Shootin' from the hip, I knocked the automatic out of his grip.

It must have numbed his fingers an' hurt pow'ful bad, kase he first grabbed 'em with the other hand an' stood starin' at me as I walked out on him, then he histed his hands above his head.

"That's all right, son," I told him. "No harm meant. Jest couldn't take no chances. Most got shot already by another nervious deppity. Sorry I ruint yo' gun; but the county will git you another." He was a stranger to me, so I knowed he must have come with Tally Martin from the next county. "You one of Tally's deppities?" I asked.

"Deppity?" he repeated, still seemin' all confused in his head, for which I couldn't blame him.

"Yes," I says, "I reckin you came over with the sheriff to git that there bank robber what was loose in the swamp. But I've done caught him, son. Got him up the swamp a piece, hog-tied an' gagged."

"Yeah," he said then, lowerin' his hands, "I'm a deppity."

"What's yo' name?" I asked, wantin' to be sociable.

"Smith," he told me.

"Any kin to Old Man Lige Smith who lives down in the forks of Juniper?"

"He's my old man," he replied to me, sort of grinnin'.

"Do tell! You ain't Jo, the oldest?"

"That's me."

"Waal, waal," I said, plum' pleased. "I knowed you when you was a little shaver, Jo. I'm Luke Tillworth.

"Jo," I continues on, "I want to ax a favor of you. I've got this here bank robber hog-tied; but he refuses to walk. I want you to help me tote him out the swamp."

"I—I'm 'fraid I couldn't tote him," he says, beginnin' to back water. " 'Spose you let me go for help."

"No," I says, firm-like, "ain't no use in ringin' anybody else in on this. We'll jest walk out with him between us an' fling him in Buck's face. That's what we'll do."

"Sorry," he said, short-like. "It will be better for me to go an' git some help." An' he turned an' walked right off from me, an' me yellin' at him to stop an' come back. For it had come to my mind that what he was a-drivin' at was to git his crowd from the other county hooked up on this thing.

He wouldn't pay me no mind when I told him to stop, but kept stridin' off, faster an' faster; so I raised my rifle an' taken his cap off. It wasn't no danger to him; but he didn't know it. He stopped dead in his tracks an' turned slowly about, his face chalky an' sort of green.

"All right, Mr. Tillman," he says. "Ef you insist, I'll go with you an' do what I can."

"All right," I replied. "That's better. An' Tillworth is the name—Luke Tillworth. Yo pappy knows me well."

But we hadn't no mo' than got started when he begun to argue with me again that he ought to go for help. His lips was quiverin', an' his face was drawed an' still had that greenish tinge.

"The trouble with you," I said, as kind as I could, "is you're scared to death. But I've already told you I've got the feller tied hand an' foot."

He stopped arguin' then, an' we walked along together, me doin' the talkin'. When we struck a hog trail he fell behind.

"How much cotton has yo' pappy got in this season?" I asked.

When he didn't give me no answer, I looked back over my shoulder. He had plum' disappeared from sight.

Now that riled me. Ain't no use in talkin', it made me plum' mad. The idee of a deppity, swore in to do his bounden duty to catch a bank robber, what was already hog-tied an' helpless, so scared that he refused even to help tote him out the swamp, made me sho 'nough mad.

"Sic 'im, Belle," I says to my houn' dog, an' away we went, her at a run, me clumpin' along at her tail end.

I HEARD him when he fell in the creek. Cuttin' across a bend, I seen him in the water up to his armpits. He had tried to cross on a log an' slipped off. I made him come to the bank an' give him a hand an' drug him out.

"You feather-legged skunk!" I said. "I know you're a coward. An' you're so lazy it hurts you to draw breath. Ef you're a sample of the deppities Tally Martin picks to help him run down crim'nals, then the Lord help him. But, Jo," I continues on mo' kindly, for the mad already had gone out of me, "you needn't be so scared. This here bank robber is fixed so he can't even call you hard names."

I made him walk ahead of me, then,

tellin' him that though it would hurt me pow'ful bad to shoot one of old Lige's boys, I'd put a neat hole through him ef he made the least bobble, an' so be careful an' not even to stumble, kase my trigger finger already had the jerks.

Old red-in-the-face was settin' up, an' ef looks could carry the thought behind 'em the one he give me would have kilt me dead in my tracks. The mud had got in his hair, as well as all over his clothes, an' he was a plum' sight.

I taken the feet end, that bein' the lightest, as I had already wore myself to a frazzle draggin' this here feller. But Jo wasn't so hefty, so I had to change places with him. To make it mo' awkward an' add to the hard work I was a-doin', I had to carry my rifle clamped up under my arm while I toted, kase I wasn't takin' no mo' chances of Jo's runnin' out on me.

Havin' to work this way, totin' the stubborn, mule headed fool, plum' spiled my natural good humor. When we'd set him down to rest I'd abuse him. An' though I ain't one to hit a feller when he's down, so to speak, I couldn't help but give him a few kicks now an' then.

"Ef I wasn't mo' kindhearted than is good for me," I told him, "I'd build a fire an' roast the bottoms of yo' feet till you was damn good an' ready to walk on 'em."

At last, sweatin' an' puffin' an' blowin' an' nigh tuckered, we struggled out on the ridge with our load. Takin' him twenty foot clear of the swamp's edge, we drapped him on the grass.

As I had already seed, Buck an' three deppities an' a old white haired gentleman was there. The hosses, their bridle reins trailin', was grazin' on the grass. Moppin' the sweat from my eyes on the sleeve of my shirt, I turned on Buck as they come stridin' up.

"Waal," I says, "while you fellers was a-settin' out here on yo' haunches takin' things easy, I went down there in the swamp an' ketched the bank robber for you. Hog-tied him an' gagged him. Then had to tote the ornery cuss nigh a mile. I'm plum' wore out." An' I jest couldn't help givin' my recent load a last departin' kick.

"Hey, you danged fools!' I yelled of a sudden. For they had all closed in on Jo. Buck had his gun shoved into Jo's belly, while the old gentleman was punchin' him in the back with another. The three deppities was standin' by, their guns drawed, ready for action.

"Buck," I says, scornful an' sarcastic, "the unintelligent way in which you blunders about, it's a wonder yo' folks lets you out without a lead string. Why, that there is Jo Smith, one of Old Man Lige Smith's boys. He's been helpin' me tote the bank robber out the swamp."

But they didn't pay no mind, an' they put the handcuffs on Jo, an' the three deppities taken him in charge. Then Buck turned to me.

"That ain't Jo Smith, you hickorynut headed fool! Here's Joe." An' he pinted his thumb at one of the deppities. "That's the bank robber. Mr. Horton recognized him soon as y'all come out the swamp."

Ef a stick of dennemite had busted inside of me I couldn't have been mo' dumfounded. At first I jest looked at Buck with my mouth hung open. Then I asked him—

"Then who is this here feller what has made me nigh break my back a-totin' him out the swamp?"

"That," says Buck, drawin' out his pocket knife, "is Tally Martin, sheriff from the next county."

Tally Martin, the go-gitter! The ripsnortin', hell-raisin' gun-shooter! The fire-eater! An' I had hog-tied him an' gagged him. I had cussed him an' called him hard names. I had abused him an' kicked him an' drug him through the mud. An' here was Buck 'bout to cut him loose with his pocket knife.

"Wait a minute, Buck," I says. "Give me a shirt-tail distance 'fo you turn him loose. I'll ride yo' hoss an' you kin double up with some of the others. I'll ride ahead into town an' git 'em to lock

me up in the jail house."

With that, I started on a run for Buck's hoss; but Mr. Horton, the banker, grabbed me by the arm. He was laughin'.

"Hold on," he says. "I don't know jest what's happened; but it seems to be a case of mistaken identity. 'Spose you tell us all about it."

BUCK had taken my bandanna out of the other sheriff's mouth. He had cut his feet loose; but he had sense enough to leave his hands still tied behind him. Tally Martin was a-spittin' an' a-roarin' like a mad bull. Gittin' on his feet, he made a break for me, an' I hopped behind Mr. Horton. Finally they got him calmed down enough to talk 'bout somethin' besides what he was a-goin' to do to me. Between us, we told 'em how it all had happened, an' I explained what a hard time I had makin' the feller I had mistook for Jo Smith help me.

This here thing was a serious matter to me. A matter of life an' death, you mought say. It seemed to me that there old banker feller had a curious idee of what was funny. While Tally Martin looked on with a expression on his face like he had chawed down on a green persimmon, an' I stood there a-tremblin' an' a-jerkin', scared to think of what was presently goin' to happen to me, Mr. Horton set right down on the ground an' shuck with laughin'.

Though I could see Buck was makin' a desprit try to hold it in, he was laughin' too, an' had to turn his face. Then, addressin' the other sheriff, he said:

"Tally, it's plum' mortifyin' to me that I should have been sich a fool as to swear in this here numbskull, Luke Tillworth, as a deppity, an' turn him loose. You'll have to make allowances, Tally. I reckin it was mo' my fault than his."

"You all seem to forgit," the banker said, settin' up, "that our friend, Luke, though by indirect means, captured the bank robber. After all, he is the one who brought home the bacon. So, Tally, my boy," he continued on, in a mo' serious way, an' seemin' to speak sort of stern, "as a good citizen an' sheriff of yo' county, with the hope of reelection, with *my* support, you'll stop makin' those threats an' let bygones be bygones. Cut him loose, Buck, so that he can shake hands with Luke an' thank him for what he has done, in his own way, to uphold the law."

An' I must say that there fire-eatin' sheriff was a good sport. He shuck my hand. He said that, in the presence of friends, he was willin' to forgive an' forgit, seein' as he couldn't help himself; but that ef ever he caught me out by myself, when he got through there wouldn't be nothin' left of me.

"Next time you go down in the swamp to git a bad man," the banker said, still a-grinnin', "you'll wear yo' star, Tally, an' have it pinned where it kin be seen at a distance."

Seein' that the jig was up anyhow, the bank robber come clean as to where he had the stuff he had taken from the bank hid—down nigh the place where I had first come on him. We led him down there an' he pinted it out. Then Buck let Tally an' his deppities take him.

When they had gone, the bank president opened the leather bag agin an' taken somethin' out. Writin' on a piece of paper, he put it in its place. Then he turned an' counted into my wonderin' hand a thousand dollars in greenbacks.

"Luke," he says, "you're a hero. You saved the bank. In savin' the bank, you saved half the town of Wadeville."

"Colonel," I replies, "I mought have been a hero; but never no mo' for me, not even for another thousand. Buck," I asked, turnin' to the sheriff, "I ain't still swore in as a deppity, am I?"

"Hell, no!" he replied, fervent-like. "You sho ain't! An' never again, ef I'm in my right mind."

"Thank the Lord for that," I says. "Come on, Belle; let's go home an' git some rest."

The Awakening of ALLAH

By GEORGE E. HOLT

AFTER Azalaia, the Riffi dancing girl, had wrought, with the assistance of Al-Lateef the Clever One, disaster upon the shaven head of her blackguard half-brother Tameem; after she had testified before a tribunal of justice that Tameem actually was the man whom the Sultan sought for the murder of an attaché of the French consulate; after her ears had heard the crack of the rifle which sent her half-brother grimacing into the hot clasp of Shaitan the Evil One; after Al-Lateef had been somewhat marvelously changed from hunted outlaw to honored chief of his Majesty's secret service—after these things it was scarcely possible that one of Azalaia's hot mountain blood should not have felt the lure of the great game of manhunting. He who has once killed a tiger ceases to think of hares.

Wherefore it was in the natural order of things that she should seek out the Clever One at his lodgings in the palace, cast aside with magnificent disdain the white *haik* which ceremony demanded should conceal her beauty upon the public streets, and in the glory of her pro-

fessional costume fling herself upon a floor cushion, light a cigaret with henna decorated fingers, stare at Al-Lateef for half a moment through half closed eyes, and then cast her question, in the bold Riff manner, at his slipper toes.

"Do I work for the chief of the Sultan's secret service—or do I not?"

Inasmuch as Al-Lateef had not without reason been tagged the Clever One, he needed little time for reflection in order to perceive that twice two is four, or that today follows yesterday and precedes tomorrow, or any such well-known truths.

"You do, Lily of the Night," he said.

The girl flashed him a glance which would have set a younger and less wise man aflame. Even Al-Lateef, who indeed was yet nearer twenty than forty, felt a most pleasant tingling in his toes and the back of his neck.

"For once, then, Allah has made a Moor who is not a fool. Now tell me such things as I should know."

Thus it was that Al-Lateef gained the first member—of his own selection, unless one should hold that it was somewhat thrust upon him—of his amazing secret intelligence organization. For calmer consideration of the value which Azalaia the dancing girl might be to him, pointed out further wisdom—the wisdom of selecting his secret helpers upon a basis quite different from that followed by his predecessors.

In truth, the organization he had inherited—if such an aggregation of rich men's sons, bashas' offspring, poor relatives of important officials and such chaff could be called an organization—gave him only doubt and unease, and the very strong suspicion that it would be the course of wisdom to trust none of them; if, indeed, it were not actually advisable to hold them all under surveillance. For, to tell truth, there had been odd tales of his predecessor's plans going sadly sidewise, crab-fashion.

Leaving the inherited incubus, then, to twiddle its thumbs and smell around the innumerable passageways of the palace, or to talk wisely in the cafés of Fez, Al-Lateef set about building up his queer group to serve the young Sultan and protect his somewhat shaky throne.

The result of his labors thus far was an astonishing aggregation. There was a black magician in a northern town, and a fat negro prophetess in Sus. A living saint in a stupendous green gown and turban acquired merit at a point where three gates of an important city brought all its traffic together. Not far from Fez, a Soudanese *tebib,* or doctor, administered charms and potions to a great community. In a certain port town of importance, a gentleman with an English name was writing a book about Moroccan history.

The marketplaces of the Fahs enjoyed the frequent visits of an ancient snake charmer, who also set straw afire by breathing upon it; and a not so ancient troubadour who told for the thousand and first time the tales of the Thousand Nights and a Night. At the chief gate of a former capital a gray bearded soothsayer squatted in the shade and read the future from mystic abracadabra scratched in the dust.

There was a turban or two or three in bashadorial mansions, and a good many brown scalplocks among the hills; and here and there one-eyed or two-eyed or no-eyed beggars wailed over their ebony alms bowls and inclined their ears to the gossip of the four winds. And so on . . .

In the making of which curious collection of agents Al-Lateef had been much facilitated by the year or two he had spent as an outlaw with prices upon his brown head; for in adversity one makes friends who may pretty well be depended upon when the wind has changed, although, oddly, the reverse does not hold.

Thus Al-Lateef multiplied himself. He possessed many eyes to watch with and many ears to extend themselves to the winds of rumor, and many feet to carry to him those tidings which seemed essential to his country's welfare and

his own merit. And of all of them, the eyes of Azalaia were the brightest and the sharpest. Her ears were attuned to whispers inaudible to grosser ears; her little feet danced into strange places, and beneath her glossy black hair was a head which could perceive the difference between *alif* and *ba* without effort.

Hence when a message from Azalaia was produced by some brown, running *rakkas* from the folds of his turban or the toe of his slipper, Al-Lateef said neither, "Hmph! More of Azalaia's imaginings"; nor, "Woman's true place is over the *kesk'soo* pot". Instead he gave instant and intent heed to her words and let no primroses grow by the river's brink ere he took action.

The *rakkas* who had brought the present message withdrew to wait further orders. Al-Lateef, squatting upon a great cushion in his living room, laid aside a cigaret, unrolled the bit of tough, yellowed paper, and read words which would have been meaningless to all save the writer and himself.

"The basha of Tetwan," he read. After which was the whorl imprinted by a dainty thumb, which had been rubbed with that same black *kohl* with which Azalaia shaded her eyebrows.

Now, verbless as this message was, it spelled action for Al-Lateef. It meant that Azalaia was satisfied that the large quantities of guns being smuggled into Morocco, to the further unrest of that restless land and great danger to the Sultan, came through the basha of Tetwan. That was the part of the great game to which she had been assigned; that was why, for a fortnight or longer, she had been dancing at a certain native café in Tetwan to the very great edification of the Tetwanis, white, black, brown, and blends thereof.

AN HOUR later Al-Lateef's horse carried him out of the Bab-el-Tanger of Arzila, and set upon the northward road that leads to Tetwan; and nightfall saw him watching Azalaia lighting a cigaret in his temporary quarters in that town.

"It is from Ceuta they come, Sidi Man-Hunter," she told him, the smoke curling from her nostrils. "There is a Spanish captain there who is becoming wealthy."

That made it clear to Al-Lateef, for Ceuta was a Spanish stronghold and prison not far from Tetwan, notorious for the military inefficiency, politics, favoritism and graft which has been so characteristic of Spain's foreign affairs under the Alfonsos.

"I have danced for that same captain," continued Azalaia, significance in a raised black eyebrow, a quirk at one corner of her scarlet lips.

Al-Lateef shrugged away that further bland confession which he saw tickling the dancing girl's tongue with intent to embarrass him. *Allah kerim!* Dancing girls were dancing girls—and the Spanish captain had no doubt paid well for his dancing. The red flower of Azalaia's lips puckered into an impertinent bud and her eyes called Al-Lateef an old woman. The gold coins looped across her full bosom chuckled derision at him as she tossed a brown shoulder.

"In his cups he becomes a parrot, a chattering monkey, a veritable gossip of his own private affairs—and those of others. Oho! What things I have heard, Sidi Saint!"

She looked sidewise at him as she flung the taunt. Al-Lateef grinned amiably.

"There is a time for work and a time for play, O Lily of the Night. But you have worked to good effect. Now as concerns the basha of Tetwan who supplies arms to the Sultan's enemies in the hills—"

"There are also other chatterers," the girl interrupted dryly. "I was about to say, when you flung moth eaten words from the Book at me, that I also danced for the basha, Hamed ibn Dowhd. And from him bought fifty rifles—for my cousin the Kaid el-Minari of Er-Rif."

Al-Lateef considered the now demure face of his fellow hunter with an ad-

miration which seemed to irritate her. It was, in truth, not the right variety of admiration, being merely approbation of her intelligence—which is base insult to a pretty woman. One word, one look of admiration for her beauty—that would have been something. But to imply that one has merely shown intelligence—bah!

"Wherefore, Sidi Stupidity," she continued, yawning openly, "tomorrow night, at moonrise, his Majesty the basha will deliver fifty guns, at a price of one hundred dollars *hassani,* to the Kaid el-Minari at the south gate of Tetwan."

She rose abruptly, as if suddenly grown tired of a childish game.

"I suppose, Sidi Intelligence—" she reached for her woolen *haik* and draped it over her head—"that you perceive that it was my thought that you should be, for the occasion, the worthy Kaid el-Minari."

"The thought really had occurred to me, O Pearl of Wisdom," said Al-Lateef. "But only with much mental effort—You must go?"

Azalaia caught the mild mockery in his voice, and replied in kind.

"It is cold here in your quarters, Sidi Snow-on-the-Mountains. You should have a fire—two fires. I go to get warm."

She drew the *haik* about her so that only two fingers and one eye showed. Al-Lateef smiled in friendly spirit. His mind was perfectly perceptive of the danger as well as the value of his fair assistant. But her very danger—to others—was what made her precious . . . He followed her to the door, opened it for her.

"Thy wit, O Lily of the Night," he said, "is no less than thy face's beauty. Rest well."

From beyond the closed door came a sound as of a small slipper stamped upon a cobblestone—and of a voice which seemed to say uncomplimentary things of wit.

Now the plan which had come into Al-Lateef's mind, as a result of what Azalaia had told him, was quite simple and direct. Posing as the Kaid el-Minari, he would meet the basha by moonlight at the south gate of the town, seize guns and basha and cart them off to Tangier, where justice would swiftly be meted out to the traitor who was supplying the Sultan's enemies with arms. Unfortunately, the Sultan could not punish Europeans guilty of aiding his enemies. Nothing could be done at the moment with the Spaniard—except to ruin his market, as it were. Or—The first faint flickerings of an idea came to Al-Lateef. He fell into deep thought.

Assuredly Al-Lateef's intentions with respect to the basha of Tetwan would have been carried out with ease and precision, had not a jesting fate seen fit to dig a deep pitfall for the feet of the chief of the secret service. By unfortunate circumstance, the real Kaid el-Minari was in Tetwan at the time, and, involving himself in a café brawl, was carried off to jail. Recognizing the name as the one Azalaia had given him—pure invention on her part—as the would-be purchaser of fifty rifles, the basha hastily sent for the brawler.

Naturally the man knew nothing of any rifles he was supposed to have arranged to purchase—and the basha fell into a stupor of thought. Shortly after he came out of it, Azalaia the dancing girl was awakened by rough hands, bundled up in a *haik* and, despite squeals, kicks and earnest words, was carted off, like a rolled carpet, to the basha's mansion.

AL-LATEEF the Clever One walked into the trap with the sweet confidence of a man who already has his enemy's head in a bag and has no more to do than tie a string about it.

He went to the rendezvous at the southern gate at the appointed time, with only a single man he had picked up on his way, who had two packmules upon which the guns could be transported. The gate, closed at sundown,

was duly opened to permit the egress of a rider swathed in a dark colored djellab, accompanied by two negroes. A dozen paces outside the gate the rider halted, looked about, called softly—

"El-Minari?"

Al-Lateef stepped out from behind a tree.

"I am here, sidi," he said. "Where are the guns?"

"They are just within the gate, my friend," replied the basha. "You have pack animals? Good! Bring them along."

He turned his mount, paced back to the shadow of the massive gateway in the wall. Al-Lateef followed, the guns first, then his Excellency the basha of Tetwan—as he should hold out his hands for the payment. The pistol he carried, easily accessible beneath his robe, would do the trick. He dismissed the basha's two slaves as unimportant.

Within the gate, two large men who had been hidden in the darkness pounced upon him as a cat upon an unsuspecting mouse. His shout of surprise was cut short by a djellab whipped about his head and then twisted around his neck, and thereafter he was dragged like a sack of barley inside the gate. The doors thudded together in the face of his slow witted muleteer, and he was half pushed, half pulled by unfriendly hands along a cobbled street, through a gateway, across a paved court and into a house. There his head was uncovered and his disgusted eyes looked into the gloating ones of the basha of Tetwan.

"Who," demanded the basha, "are you?"

Al-Lateef replied forcefully.

"Liar!" said the basha. "Kaid el-Minari is in my jail."

Oho! So that was it. Accident had played him a nasty trick then, thought Al-Lateef. Or—had Azalaia let her passions get away with her loyalty? What should he say in reply? It was manifest that the basha was not acquainted with the face of the head of the secret service. Equally manifest that if the basha learned that the man before him was that one, he would be forced to assassination in order to save his own head from the sword.

"It is true that I made use of a name not my own, sidi. But is it wise, in such a matter, to use one's own name? The dancing girl, Azalaia, told me that I could buy guns from you. Through her I expressed my desire to buy. Does my name matter?"

"It does," insisted the basha. "At least it does to you in your present fix. Who are you?"

"I," Al-Lateef said, with apparent reluctance, "am Kaid Ahmed es-Slawi, of Arzila."

There being no such person, as far as Al-Lateef was aware, it was improbable that the basha would contradict this. He looked frankly into his captor's gaze, and was disturbed as an odd look came in the face he watched.

"Oho! You are, are you? Kaid Ahmed es-Slawi, eh? Of Arzila, yes? And that devil-cat of a dancing girl told me that you were Kaid Mustapha of El K'sar! *After* she knew that Kaid el-Minari was in jail. Hmph!"

He hunched himself, cross-legged, along the floor cushion on which he sat, glared at Al-Lateef standing between two powerful blacks, selected an opprobrious epithet and spat it at his prisoner. Then, abruptly tired of this business of thinking, he growled:

"Take him away. Lock him up. Guard him with your lives."

Well, that was not so bad as it might be, Al-Lateef reflected. A message sent to the right people—even if prompt escape were not possible . . . It would take time. Bribery, unless this basha's prison guards were different from all others . . . No, not bad.

And Azalaia? He knew that she, too, was a prisoner. She must be released. The tables must be reversed—but how?

He turned and went almost cheerfully between his guards. But before they reached the door it opened; a dark

faced, pock marked, evil eyed man stood framed in the doorway, stared at Al-Lateef as at an apparition. Instantly Al-Lateef recognized him as a fellow he had once treated to fifty lashes at the whipping post in Tangier. Instantly he knew that the fat was in the fire.

"Allah above!" cried Pock-marks to the basha. "You entertain one of importance!"

"What fool's phrases do you utter now, fatherless one?" growled the basha.

Pock-marks ignored him; made mocking *salaam* to Al-Lateef.

"May the humble Al-Arbi pay his most dutiful respects to Al-Lateef, the Clever One?" he said. Then he added, for good measure, "Chief of his Majesty's secret service, if I am not mistaken."

With which words he avenged himself for the fifty lashes; knew that he condemned Al-Lateef to death at the hands of the basha, and thus made himself the basha's master until that one, or himself, should cease to breathe.

Now though black fear seized the basha, made his knees tremble and his stomach twist and his tongue to become as a slipper sole in hot sand, he perceived, as in a vision, that there was but one way out of this business. It was his life against Al-Lateef's—against Al-Lateef's and that cursed dancing girl's. They had to die, or else he himself would—and the two black slaves as well. And, yes, assuredly, Al-Arbi of the pock-marks. Then, and then only, would he himself be safe. Allah damn that Spanish captain who had lured him into this business! Allah's curses on everybody! Life was Shaitan's own invention, but death was still worse . . .

Well, he would drink wine now, and make Pock-marks drink wine—much wine for them both. Then they would kill Al-Lateef and Azalaia, the dancing girl, and the two blacks—and immediately thereafter Sidi Pock-marks' drunken feet would be staggering on the bridge which spans hell.

"Take your prisoner to the strong room and guard him with your lives," he again commanded the blacks. "And you, Al-Arbi, go and order that wine be brought. To—to celebrate our escape from Al-Lateef."

"Our escape, sidi? *Our* escape?" said Pock-marks. "Now indeed I wonder what your Excellency has been up to."

"I shall tell you, offspring of evil, while we drink wine. I am—hmph!—grateful that you recognized Al-Lateef. I shall not forget the debt."

"Fifty lashes on the bare back, sidi, are quite an aid to memory," replied Al-Arbi. "And besides, if you wish to square the debt quickly and cheaply, sidi—"

"Speak, then."

"Give the dancing girl to me, instead of to your black swordsman. For a few days. Then—" He drew a brown forefinger across his neck and grinned.

"Dangerous sport," replied the basha, frowning. "You— Wait until our guest has gone."

He watched Al-Lateef as he was led from the room.

THIS was a bad business, Al-Lateef told himself. He was led roughly along silent corridors, and a certain door being reached and opened, a black hand seized him by the neck and shot him forward into a lightless room. The door banged and its bolt chuckled . . .

Bad business indeed. Not only because Azalaia was a woman, but because she was one of his aides, his arm must protect her. And Pock-marks was wholly evil. Where was she? What could he, her chief, do?

The Clever One's feet told him that his slippers rested on carpet; hence there might be floor cushions along the walls. He extended a hand in the thick darkness to touch the door, followed the wall along to a corner, and turned it, his steps silent in the heavy pile of the carpet. One foot touched a cushion; a little squeal of fright or surprise shot up, accompanied by the whispers of a body

moving quickly.

"Who—who— Get away!"

Al-Lateef stiffened, then smiled grimly.

"Good evening to you, Lily of the Night," he said.

"What? It is you! Al-La—" The knife of discretion cut off the word. A sniff. "Allah assuredly has gotten us into a nice mess. Sit down; sit down—and give me a cigaret if you have one. That devil's spawn of a black took mine away from me—and my knife also."

"I have cigarets," replied Al-Lateef, as he lowered himself to the cushion beside the girl he could not see, but whose perfume enwrapped him. "If you will untie my hands—"

The girl's soft fingers found his wrists, and Al-Lateef tingled to their touch. Her fragrant head came close to him as she worked at the knots. And when the cords came free, two warm and expressive hands seized and held his for a moment. His hands found cigarets; a match illuminated his face and the girl's; cigaret tips grew red; two pairs of dark eyes gazed into each other for a moment.

"Unfortunately, Lily of the Night, I fear that you and I shall not smoke many more cigarets—either together or alone—unless our wits perform somewhat of a miracle, and that very shortly."

He proceeded to tell her what had occurred and, a matter of greater importance now, what inevitably must be done by the basha and Pock-marks for the security of their own heads. But he did not tell her of what Pock-marks planned for her.

"You mean," the girl asked, with a little suspension of breath, "that he will dare—dare to murder the chief of the Sultan's secret service!"

"But what else can he do, O Lily? Allah is my witness that, were I in his shoes, I should do it, and without delay. It's his life or mine. The man is something of a coward, however, or he would have finished this business in the other room and without dallying."

"He is a coward, somewhat," Azalaia agreed with him. "But he will drink wine—much wine—with that one whose face looks as though Shaitan had stamped on it. After which murder will be a pastime."

"Already they have begun," said Al-Lateef.

"Oh—so? Verily, this is a pleasant situation. It there were but the chanting of mourners now— They will become mightily brave with Spanish wine and mutual boastings. The basha will come to believe himself the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, no less, and—and then they will come to kill us."

Two minutes of thought gave Al-Lateef a cold chill of futility. There was nothing to think about, except the sum total of the cards which lay upon the table. The situation was so simple that it was deadly. They were prisoners, weaponless. They had to die for the safety of the basha. There was no more escape from this room than from a grave. No way out of the danger—no way to safety. But one thing to be done. When they came he would attack with his bare hands, and die fighting, single handed against two armed blacks and Pock-marks and the basha. Perhaps he could hold their attention for a moment while Azalaia slipped by them and proved the one chance in a million that she could escape from the guarded mansion.

After a little while, when he saw that there was nothing else to do, he told her this.

The girl flew into a passion of refusal. Was she this and that and the other thing—and she used plain words—that she should sneak away like a beaten dog while Al-Lateef died?

"Together we fight them, mark you," she said. "My arms are strong, my hands, my heart—and my nails are sharp. I am as big as you are. Let us attack them together, instantly the door is opened. Let us take them by surprise—perhaps one or the other of us

can seize a weapon from them, the blacks being slow witted. I shall not be led to the knife like a sheep at the Feast of Aïd-el-Kebir!"

It stood at that, then. The girl was right. Better for them both. And there was also that which she did not know. Yes. Better for them both. She could never get away from the house anyhow. But—wasn't there some other way? And again Al-Lateef began the terrible round of visualization, consideration—and rejection. Getting nowhere. Getting—

Steps sounded in the corridor. Uneven steps. A voice—that of Pock-marks. Harsh, drunken.

"Where's that dancing girl? Where is she? What room is she in?"

The deep mutter of the black guard at the door came in reply.

"Here, eh? Well, bring her out. I'll take care of her."

Al-Lateef and Azalaia were on their feet. Bodies touching, they moved up to the door, ready to spring when it should be opened.

"Only two against us," breathed the girl. "Our gods are kind."

"I take the black," commanded Al-Lateef. "You take Pock-marks. Swiftly, before his wits can work. Seek the knife at his belt."

The girl's hand pressed his shoulder. The black's guttural voice said:

"Nay, sidi. My orders from the basha were clear. He must command that I open the door. My head answers for it."

"Curse you for a foul slave," cried Pock-marks, "I come with your master's consent. Open."

"No, sidi." The slave stood his ground. "My master's command. An order, sidi. By mouth or by a writing."

Eyes must have met eyes and one pair been conquered, for Pock-marks growled—

"Very well; I go to bring the writing—" and staggered away.

Al-Lateef started to breathe a sigh of relief for the brief respite—held it.

"Azalaia!" he whispered. "Give attention. Quickly. I have a thought. Perhaps our gods have awakened."

Swiftly he told her what that thought was that had come to him at the moment when mind and body had been keyed to highest possible pitch, waiting the signal for life's final desperate battle.

AL-ARBI of the pock-marks came shuffling back.

"There," he growled. "Now will you open the door?"

The black was satisfied with the scrawled order.

"Yes, sidi," he replied, and turned the key in the lock, loosened the door.

The evil face of Al-Arbi looked into the darkness of the door.

"Azalaia," he called.

"I am here," replied the girl.

"I—I have bought your safety from—from the basha," lied Al-Arbi, his voice uncertain with wine. "If you will come with me, I will take you away. Make haste."

"I come quickly," said the dancing girl.

Al-Arbi grinned drunkenly and tried to focus both eyes upon the *haik*-wrapped white figures which came swiftly from the room. But he could see little with either eye, for the white veil hid the face, save for two dark eyes.

"Come with—with me," said Al-Arbi and, turning, staggered off to his chambers, the slippers of his captive following.

The black guard spat upon the tiles, shrugged and relocked the door.

Al-Arbi threw open the door of his chambers, entered and stood swaying. The white *haik* followed. Al-Arbi closed the door. His hand reached out, seized the rough woolen garment to strip it from brown head and fair shoulders. A jerk, and it fell away, as did also the face veil. Al-Arbi started to cry out, but a hard brown hand was at his windpipe and the hard brown eyes of Al-Lateef beat against his own. Panic weakened him. His knees bent; he fell

to the tiled floor. Two hands at his throat now. Hands which raised his head and beat it down against the tiles. Allah, this was death.

Al-Lateef made quick work of it; there was need for haste. Had he killed this thing which remained upon the floor, mouth open, eyes shut, breathless, when he at last arose? What difference? Swiftly he resumed face veil and *haik* and heelless slippers. He drew a knife from Al-Arbi's belt and thrust it into his own. He looked about, found a heavy brass candlestick a foot in length, and concealed it beneath the *haik*. He left the room, and went in search of the basha of Tetwan.

Now the basha, when the first glow of the wine was in his veins, had gladly given the dancing girl up to the lust and knife of Al-Arbi; but by the time that one had gone to secure the girl and had returned for a written order to the black guard, the wine had changed his mood, so that it was with irritation and reluctance that he gave the writing. And when a few more glasses of the forbidden beverage had slipped down his throat, he perceived that he had been altogether too unwise and generous.

Why should a pock-marked dog like Al-Arbi enjoy the charms of the dancing girl? By Allah, she was, after all, a beauty. His blood was hot now. Danger? Pah! What danger? He was the basha. Al-Lateef, the swine, was as good as dead. Why think about such trifles? What mattered was the dancing girl. He would go get her.

He finished his glass with a single gulp, rose, balanced himself as best he could, drew his knife and started out; but before he had crossed his room the door swung open, and a white *haiked* figure stepped in, closing the portal. Brown eyes gazed at the basha above face veil, then looked quickly about the room.

"You—you must be that dancing girl—" began the basha, who remembered that his own women were certainly shut up in the harem, not wandering about the palace. "Good! That swine Al-Arbi— Come here!"

She came, with a swish of the *haik*, and with swift but sure motion brought the brass candlestick down upon the basha's head.

It was a moment's work to truss him up with his own turban cloth; but swiftly as he worked Al-Lateef had scarcely finished when he heard the slither of slippers on the tiles of the corridor. He dragged the basha into a small, curtained alcove, pulled a robe from a peg on the wall and got into it, wrapped a length of turban cloth about the lower part of his face and, making sure that the knife was still in his belt, went back into the room as a knock sounded on the door. He seated himself upon the floor cushion where the basha had sat.

"Who comes?" he called, imitating as best he could the basha's drunken voice.

"The Spanish captain to see your Excellency," replied a guard.

The Spanish captain! Hmph! More danger, thought Al-Lateef. And yet he would very much value a few words with that Spanish captain—if he could pass himself off as the basha. Quickly he filled the basha's wine glass, took the knife from his belt and laid it beside him on the cushion.

"Let the Spanish captain enter—and go away."

Al-Lateef managed a convincing hiccough as the Spaniard entered.

The man he saw was in Moroccan dress, the dress of the hillman. He bowed to the basha, then raised his eyebrows as he noted that his host's face was bandaged from eyes to chin. Al-Lateef explained briefly, swaying unsteadily, his voice thick.

"Boils," he said. "Boils. Shaitan sends them. For our sins. Sit down. What do you want?"

The Spaniard came forward, baring his teeth in a smile.

"Money, Sidi Basha, and it pleases you," he replied. "As was arranged."

"Money?" Al-Lateef stared owlishly

at the captain.

"For the guns, sidi—the hundred carbines I sent you."

"Oh—money. That's all right. Sit down. Sit down here." Al-Lateef patted the cushion beside him. "Money—yes."

The Spaniard drew the skirts of his djellab about him and sat down.

"Money," reiterated Al-Lateef. "I'll get it." He rose with obvious difficulty and stood erect a moment. "Have wine," he said.

He picked up the bottle by the neck and crashed it down upon the captain's head. The Spaniard slumped over without a word.

"Now," Al-Lateef told himself, "if I can get my two precious prisoners to Tangier, gun smuggling in this province ought to be out of fashion for awhile. As for the captain, even the Spanish authorities must feel obliged to punish him, when they are shown— Allah! Who comes now?"

It was Al-Arbi who burst violently into the room, eyes wild, knife in hand. He saw the basha, as he supposed, leaning over the body of a man who lay face downward.

"Who is it?" he called.

Al-Lateef cursed the intrusion, gave the first reply which came into his head.

"Al-Lateef," he said.

And then, to his surprise and dismay, Pock-marks leaped through the air and plunged his blade into the back of the unconscious Spaniard. Before he could straighten up again, Al-Lateef's knife was out. Justice was in his hand—and law. And so, after an amazed slash of Al-Arbi's knife, Al-Lateef's weapon sank home, and Pock-marks fell across the body of his victim. Al-Lateef studied them a moment. Then he shrugged.

"That will take care of the Spanish question," he muttered. He strode to the door and into the corridor—staggered until he came in sight of the black guard squatting outside the prison room. At that discreet distance he remained.

"You," he called, "bring that girl to me. That girl—" his voice seemed thick with wine—"who calls herself Lily of the Night."

That was for Azalaia to hear.

The guard rose, opened the door, and Azalaia, without her *haik*, all her dancing girl's silks and finery blazing, came forth. Al-Lateef turned and led the way to the basha's chambers. There, while her eyes glowed and said many things, he told her what had thus far resulted from the thought that had come to him in the stress of immediate danger.

"And now," he continued, "we have but to get the basha, alive, and ourselves—also alive—out of the place. Past the guards. No small trick. Are they numerous?"

"Sufficiently," Azalaia told him. "Two at the main doorway; and three or four at the gates. But wait; do you know where we are?" And at Al-Lateef's puzzled glance, "I mean—this house is part of the city wall. That window is right above the wall. If we had a rope—" She needed to draw no picture for her chief.

"Ropes can be made," he said, and went into the alcove, which was the basha's bedroom, returning quickly with an armful of rolled turbans.

Azalaia laughed and reached forth eager hands. In an undisturbed half hour they had their rope.

"You first, O Lily of the Night," commanded Al-Lateef. "Then the basha."

And so the Lily of the Night, all smiles, dropped slowly down the thirty feet of wall in a loop, and placed foot upon the dark earth. And soon the basha came, a now conscious bundle of wrath. And last, Al-Lateef, sliding down the braided turban cloth.

The basha walked at last, with Al-Lateef's knife prodding his back, and so they came to a sleeping village where Al-Lateef had a friend who roused three donkeys; and then, donkeyback, they came to the gates of Tangier as the dawn broke—the last dawn the basha of Tetwan was to see, for the punishment of the *naïb es-Sidna*, the Sultan's khalifa in Tangier, was swift for traitors.

YO-HO-HO *and a* BOTTLE OF SAMSHU!

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE eleven-hundred-ton coasting steamer *Nan Yan* was due to sail for Hongkong at eight o'clock that cold, snow spitting February night. As my rickshaw coolie sprinted the last few feet up the French Bund at Shanghai, and on to the dock, I stared at the *Nan Yan* with considerable apprehension. It looked like a mere pigmy vessel alongside two huge, triple-decked Yangtse River steamers anchored a short distance farther up the Bund.

This apprehension of mine was not alone caused by the sight of the ship. After I had booked my passage, a number of kind and considerate friends took a rousing delight in forecasting the dangers I would run on the voyage. Pirates were rampant in the waters around Hongkong. These frowsy Chinese corsairs were turning their attention to just such vessels as this. Already, that Winter, some ten ships had been captured—amid scenes of panic among the Chinese passengers and, usually, the death of the British captain and his officers who refused to surrender.

Going gloomily aboard ship, I walked along a wet and deserted upper deck to Cabin A, for which my ticket called. I opened the door upon a stateroom that had all the cheer and warmth of an ice house. It was almost sailing time and, as none of the other cabins were lighted, I judged that I was to be the only first class passenger. After opening my bags for the night, I returned to the deck. Although cold, at least it failed to resemble a mortuary chapel.

The freight loading was finished and the hatches were being rapidly lashed down with canvas shrouding. But, on to the open deck below me, a long stream of Chinese passengers, each burdened with bundles, was still steadily pouring. A Chinese quartermaster was tallying them as they stepped on to the wet deck. A dismal place, that deck, practically shelterless. The passengers squatted upon their haunches, drawing straw capes about them. A few raised oiled paper umbrellas which—as I had learned by my own experience—would soon lose their oil and become sodden.

Becoming chilled to the bone in spite of my warm and fairly dry clothing, I left the deck and went into the ship's combined social hall and dining saloon. It was empty, except for the No. 1 boy, who raised a yawning face from the cubby hole which was the bar and pantry. I ordered a stiff whisky-tansan. A single oil lamp burned in a wall bracket, too dim to permit reading. Hours slowly dragged past. Nine, ten, eleven o'clock. What was delaying us? Not those deck passengers. On the Yangtse, and on the northern coasting lines, I had seen ships pull out on scheduled time, in spite of scores of would-be Chinese voyagers who danced and screamed in despair.

At last I went out to investigate. I heard shouts aft, apparently coming from that open lower deck. I ran to the rail. There, an extraordinary sight met my eyes. Three Sihks, bearded and turbaned, wearing the blue tunics of the

International City police; five Annamites in the pancake helmets and khaki of the French Concession's gendarmerie; the ship's captain, a portly Englishman with a walking stick in his hand, were engaged in the act of clubbing and kicking every single passenger on that deck down the gangplank and to the dock. The Chinese offered no opposition to this display of force; meekly they went.

In less than five minutes the lower deck was empty. The policemen from Annam and from India also went down the plank. In one corner an old Chinese woman cowered, overlooked by the officers of the law. But the captain spied her. He gave a brief smile, lifted her gently to her feet and propelled her to the rail.

"Sorry, old lady," I heard him say. "But we're taking no deck passengers this voyage. You can catchee your money back at office. You savvy? At office, tomorrow morning."

The skipper then climbed the stairs to the main deck.

"Evening, sir," he said politely to me and made as though to push on.

"Wait a moment, Captain. What's happened?"

He paused for an uncertain moment, then shrugged.

"Come with me, sir, and I'll show you."

I followed him to his cabin. There, on its floor, was the queerest collection of objects it has ever been my fortune to see gathered in a single heap. Knives: pen, butcher and reaping. Axes and meat cleavers. Daggers and poignards. A dozen small, wickedly curved swords. And pistols—ranging from a percussion capped dueling weapon to a modern six-shot revolver.

"Those came from the deck passengers," the skipper said grimly. "From their clothing, from their baggage. I was lucky enough to be looking down from the bridge as one of them came aboard. He stooped a little as he stepped up the gangplank, and I saw the handle of a sword pushing out his tunic, making him look humpbacked. I called the dock police, we made a search, and this was the haul."

"But what were they going to do with these?"

"Planning to use them to take over my ship, probably just as we drew across from Bias Bay. In other words, they were a gang of pirates, smuggling themselves aboard us as deck passengers."

The captain paused and pulled from his pocket a huge gold turnip of a watch.

"Well, we can still catch the tide. If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll give the signal to start."

When Piracy Reigned on

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

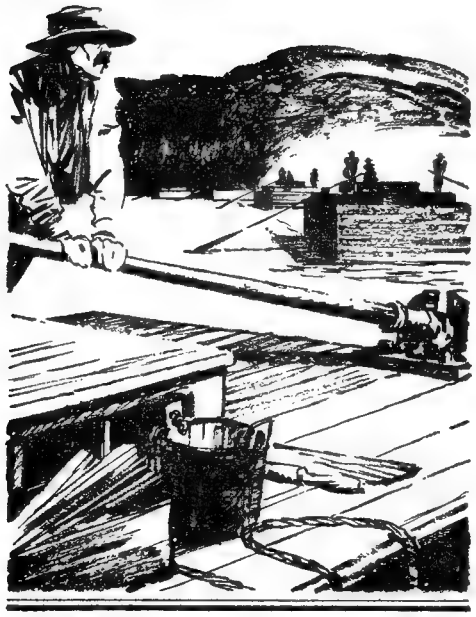
IT WAS Springtime in the Ohio country, and the whole Western world was resurgent with the desire of a strong people to conquer and tame an empire, which, from lack of definite knowledge, was conveniently called "the Lousiana Purchase". Even the members of Congress did not know the true extent, or the nature, of the unexplored and seemingly illimitable domain. The battle of New Orleans had convinced Europe that a veteran army, although led by the brother-in-law of the mighty Duke of Wellington, could be whipped by a provincial people, unaided by European troops. This wholly American triumph struck off the last shackles of fear from the citizens of the new Republic.

The tremendous trend of development was down the Ohio and the Mississippi valleys, with the national leaders wondering what was to be done with the vast territory. It was the golden era of the flatboat, as the practicability of steam navigation against the river's strong currents had not yet been satisfactorily established.

The young Republic vibrated with enthusiasm and optimism. None faced life with more zest than did Gregory Gray, junior partner of Gray and Gray, Pittsburgh. As from Grant's Hill he pridefully looked down on the clouds of smoke rising from the banks of the

the Mississippi

LOST CARGOES



By HUGH PENDEXTER

Allegheny, he remarked to his companion:

"This section of the country, Ann, will lead the whole world in trade and manufactories. Your next husband will be a lively factor in that development."

The girl flushed and gently remonstrated:

"It's not proper to talk like that. You will be my first and last husband . . . Some one is coming."

Gray turned his head as a woman emerged from a thicket of laurel. She was haggard of face and gray of hair. Her eyes smoldered as she beheld the young couple. In a strident voice she told them:

"You're safe enough up here. Your father is safe in his countin' room. Why should you fret because my man is dead, horribly murdered, down the river? He worked hard for you Grays. Now he is dead, done to death and buried away from his home. But what do you Grays care? You can send more men to take the boats through to the southern country. What's the life of a poor flatboatman to the Grays?"

Gray's face flushed. He gently told her:

"My father and I do care, Mrs. Black. We've arranged to have poor William's body brought back here. He was trusted—none more so. And so long as you live you never shall be in need. We have taken care of that. If we closed our business this day, or both should die, you would be well provided for."

"Never be in need!" she fiercely repeated. "What can hurt me, now he's gone?"

"I'm so awfully sorry, Mrs. Black," spoke up the girl.

"Yet you can laugh and be happy." She turned as if to go away, then paused to say, "If he'd been drowned, or killed in a fight with river thieves, defendin' your property, it wouldn't be so cruel

hard. But to be murdered by a devil-thing—somethin' on two legs that kills like a beast! The third Gray boatman to go that way. Nothin' done to find the fearsome critter and wipe it out."

The girl's eyes were asking questions. Young Gray admitted:

"It's the horrible truth. But I don't see how we are to blame. Black was killed near Ford's Ferry; another near Cave-In Rock; and the third at the mouth of the Cumberland."

"And how long will you and your father go on, makin' profits, makin' more widders, without runnin' some risk yourself?" harshly demanded the woman.

"But, Mrs. Black—" began the girl.

"Lone Widder Black," sharply corrected the bereaved woman. "I'd never complain if he'd been drowned. I know the risks of storm and flood he had to take. But the way he died! It's with me, day and night. But the Grays sit safe in their countin' room. You have to woo and wed and be happy. Why don't you float downriver and look into these devil killin's? Or be you scared?"

Young Gray's face was crimson under the taunt. But his voice was composed as he said:

"There is some justice in what you say, Mrs. Black. I will go down the river—"

"No, no!" cried the girl, her brown eyes dilating with horror as she recalled the gruesome stories her unwilling ears had heard.

"—and see if I can't find the terrible thing that kills in such a horrible manner. I have arranged for a man, much more capable than I ever can be, to take up that work. I will start a message to him this very day, telling him to meet me at Ford's Ferry."

"You'll do nothing but lose your life," whispered the girl.

The widow, weak and pitiable, now recanted, saying:

"God forbid that you should git killed, Mr. Gray. Men would be thrown out of work. You're not the kind to pry into such a ghastly business. Forget my takin' on so. I'm fair mad in my head."

"You've been robbed most foully of an honest husband. Gray and Gray ask no man to run risks that a Gray is afraid to take— Ann, it's useless to argue with me. It's what I should do—will do. Mrs. Black, I'm sorrier for you than I can say."

THUS it resulted from a stroll with his sweetheart on Grant's Hill that young Gray and his father conferred in their counting room with a score of merchants who were active in the Ohio and Mississippi trade. Gray senior, an incisive, white haired man, reviewed the flatboat era and reminded his hearers that from the beginning the lawless element had persisted in reaping where it had not sown. In part he said:

"Scarcely a man here who has not suffered big losses because of these river pirates. What's worse, honest men have been killed while trying to protect our goods. The Government can not help us. The pirates are well organized. We will organize. One of my agents reports that certain men bring gold overland to Tennessee and Kentucky, who never carried any trade downriver. My son and this agent will investigate the bloodiest angle of the whole terrible business. I know Colonel Pointer, from Virginia—"

Colonel Pointer, ruddy of face and white of hair, was quick to complain:

"My last big flat simply vanished. Not one of the crew has returned."

"That's a terrible indictment in very few words," said Gray senior.

"Those devils never leave a witness," added a Harrisburg man.

"Who is your special agent, Gray?" asked another.

"Tennessee man. Commonly known as Ramblin' Peevy because of his wide roamings. We've lost three fine boatmen. The pirates either take the goods down to Natchez or New Orleans, or

bring them back here and sell them to some unscrupulous trader."

"Ford's Ferry must be a lookout station," suggested another.

"Only by great cunning could these wholesale lootings be continued," said Colonel Pointer. "The nature of our cargoes seems to be known long before they reach a river trap. You have a plan, Mr. Gray?"

Gray senior winced as he replied:

"My son is going He will meet Peevy at Ford's Ferry. Naturally, I'd prefer he remained here. Although every point along the rivers is a possible hiding place for the villains, my son believes he can find a clue at the ferry. Peevy believes the headquarters is somewhere in the canebrakes of the Louisiana country, with the selling end of the business conducted in New Orleans. But he believes the spider who sits in the center of the web must be at Natchez the greater part of the time. Once that leader is found and removed, the big band will split into small bands, which, lacking leadership, can be run down in turn."

"Surely it's every man for himself, once he floats down the Ohio," grimly warned Colonel Pointer. "I'm backing young Gray. Wipe out the scum by any means and at any cost."

"We mustn't forget," said young Gray, "that the outlaws, if organized, are spread over much territory. They used to grab blindly whatever came along. Now they have a system. That means they have spies right in our midst. I think every one of us should study his counting room and warehouse help carefully."

"You've hit a big nail on the head," agreed Colonel Pointer. "Just how will you go about your work, Mr. Gray? Under a different name, of course?"

"I think not, sir. It's a common name. I'll go as a young Englishman getting material for a book. André Michaux and his son, François, Cummings, Butterick and others have traveled up and down the river, so they could write books about what they saw. One more traveler of that sort shouldn't be suspected. Of course, I'm depending largely on our private agent, Peevy. He's proven himself to be very shrewd."

"I've heard of him," said the colonel. "A peculiar type. I've heard him described as a bully, a coward, only a bit better than an idiot, and as being wiser than Solomon."

"And I've suspected, sir, that there are several Peevys in the one man. My father met him years ago in Tennessee. I never have seen him."

After this conference had ended and the merchants had departed, Gray prepared for his new rôle. Pointer had given much helpful advice, as he had entertained the Michauxs, father and son, as well as John Bradbury, of London. His acquaintance with these, and other distinguished foreign travelers, enabled him to advise wisely as to dress and luggage of oversea men, who sought material for travel books and lectures. To avoid any apparent association with the house of Gray and Gray, the matter of conveying the investigator down the river was left entirely in the colonel's hands. To further the deception the colonel gave Gray letters of introduction to several of his business agents on the Ohio and the Mississippi.

Gray surreptitiously took his departure early one morning. A trusted employee ferried him two miles below the forks to a small broadhorn, so called from two of the steering oars, which, thrust out on either side, suggested horns. It was a big box on a scow, used by Amos Lane, traveling factor for Pointer. Lane had lived much on the edge of danger. Snags, highwater, shallows and river pirates filled his thoughts. The latest edition of Cramer's "Navigator" was always close at hand. He had aged prematurely. He was glad to have Gray as a companion, as his crew of two men were typical boatmen who lived only to reach a landing where liquor could be procured.

He played his part admirably and, as

far as the boatmen were concerned, was meeting a young Englishman. As the broadhorn took to the middle of the river, floating at the rate of four miles an hour, Gray was a bit startled to behold a mound of blankets in a narrow bunk suddenly take on life and move convulsively.

"Only Bim, river character," explained Lane. "A trifle queer. Lives on the river. Shifts from boat to boat. Never knew him to stay ashore in any big town. Ever read in poetry where a fellow has to sail and sail over many seas and never can go ashore?"

"Surely. Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner'."

"That's Bim. Something went bust in his top piece. He must have served during the Revolutionary War. Much of the time he lives in a world that we can't enter. As a rule he can take a line ashore nimbly enough, and do simple errands. He knows a heap about the river, and can always pick the most likely place for hauling up for the night— See! He's back in the old war."

The eccentric, ragged in dress and shaggy of beard, was now sharpening a long knife on a whetstone. The weapon was thin from much whetting.

"Talk just as if he wasn't here," said Lane. "Now he hears a voice giving commands. He's going into battle... Queer old coot."

Bim had pulled a gun from under the blankets and was now stepping out on deck. He stood rigidly erect and cried in a thin voice: "Poise your firelock! Cock your firelock! Present! Fire! . ."

Thus he continued, until he had gone through the manual of arms, consisting of nineteen motions in response to thirteen commands.

Gray, seeking the spirit of make-believe, left the shelter and seated himself on the deck and asked questions that any waterfront urchin could have answered. It was excellent preparation for the task ahead. He wrote much in a thick leather bound notebook, which he carried conspicuously, in typical tourist style.

Down the river was a brave company of huge arks, one having a log cabin, loopholed for rifles. On the Virginia side was a floating barnyard, from which came the whinny of horses, the mooing of cattle, the bleat of sheep, and a rooster's brave defiance.

Dangerously close to a point ahead a floating store was desperately striving to escape a treacherous eddy. Against the current, and close inshore, was a barge with canoe-like lines; in fact, an old-time keelboat with a covered shelter. It was being propelled upstream by long poles.

Gray thrilled at the grandeur of the broad highway, despite his realization of the risks he was running. It seemed impossible that in thirty years such changes could have taken place. Three decades back, and it had been death for the white man to plant corn on the Indian, or north shore. Now it was often death to attempt selling necessities to those pioneers' children who had succeeded the red man.

Gray's brooding was interrupted by the factor's low voiced reminder:

"The colonel's name is respected clear through to New Orleans. If you wish, I can tie up at Ford's Landing for a few days."

"I'll be there but a few days. Your company is pleasanter than that of strangers. I feel as if we'd known each other for years."

"Very good of you to say so. It will simplify matters for you, such as lodgings and bothering with luggage ashore."

The remainder of the voyage was without incident, except that Gray was thrilled when Lane elected to pass Louisville by the middle chute, the water being above the middling stage. It was a glorious sunny morning when the broadhorn nosed into the Kentucky shore and Gray stepped on dry land for the first time since entering the boat at Pittsburgh.

CHAPTER II

MR. PEEVY

THE loungers along the riverfront eyed the newcomer curiously. Word was immediately passed that he was some sort of "furriner". Gray beheld a new species. The red flannel shirts and occasional loose blue coat, the coarse brown trousers of linsey-woolsey, and the fur hats and moccasins were novel. Despite blankly staring eyes and general lethargy, Gray shrewdly suspected the men could be vicious as wildcats the instant provocation were offered, or even suspected. Lane called out:

"Be neighborly to this gentleman from England. He's Colonel Pointer's friend."

"To hell with England!" growled a man.

"You, Bill! Mind your manners, or your name will go down in my black book," warned Lane.

"Hurrah for Cunnel Pointer!" amended the offender.

Gray surveyed the staring, silent group; then he announced:

"I'm an Englishman, but the war is over. We got whipped. I admire your nation so highly that I've come to visit it. If any of you care to imbibe so early in the day, I have some money to exchange for liquor."

The loungers were puzzled until they heard the last word. A tall man, who was draped over a snubbing post, softly asked—

"You 'low to buy drinks for the whole kit 'n' caboodle of us, mister?"

"That's my wish and pleasure," assured Gray.

In a trice he was alone with Lane. The objective of the thirsty was a saloon a few rods from the river. Ford's Inn was a mile or more back from the landing. The low log structure presented a scene of animation when Gray stepped over the threshold. The proprietor was skeptical until Gray spun a gold coin over the bar. He retired to a bench outside the door while his money was being transmuted into strong drink. The ferry had Golconda and Shawneetown for rivals, yet it caught most of the northbound traffic because of Ford's shrewdness in building eight miles of good road southward; he had also constructed twelve more on the Illinois side. Three men came up to where Ford was sitting, and he invited them to go inside and refresh themselves. One held back and explained:

"Lost one of our number. I'm plumb worried. Joel Bean, a fine young man. Took a walk after dark last night. Ain't showed up."

"Got turned around in the darkness and slept out," suggested Gray.

"He never walked all night, knowing he was lost. We fired guns last night and early this morning. I'm 'fraid he met some robbers."

"They wouldn't bother him, beyond taking what little hard money he had," encouraged Gray.

"He had two thousand dollars in script and hard money," whispered the emigrant. "If he met his come-uppance, it's at the hand of some sneaking robber."

The man turned and walked back down the road. Gray gave his thoughts to his own plans. Ramblin' Peevy should have been at the landing to meet him. He could not make inquiries for the man, but his non-appearance was annoying. The emigrant changed his mind and hurried back just as Bim appeared, to lean against the building and sharpen his knife on his boot. Finally he sheathed the knife and proceeded to go through the manual of arms.

"What'n Tophet's he up to?" whispered the emigrant.

Gray tapped his head significantly.

One of the men emerged and told Gray:

"That's mortal handsome whisky. I can feel it workin' in my leathers."

He thrust forward a booted leg and took several grotesque dancing steps.

"Here comes a man, too late to git a

snort," said another citizen.

"Give the man a drink when he arrives," Gray called out to the proprietor, whose heavy figure now filled the low doorway.

The runner came to a staggering halt and dramatically gasped—

"Devil-cat's been prowlin' ag'in!"

"Lawd 'a'mercy!" exclaimed the emigrant. "What kind of a critter is it?"

"You'll soon see by his works. They're fetchin' him in."

The new arrival, his mouth gaping foolishly, was staring down the road. Excited queries were hurled at him, but he did not seem to hear. Gray rejoined Lane and repeated what he had heard.

"It means brutal, bloody murder," whispered Lane. "I saw one sample of its work. God grant I never see another! See how the men fetching him in stumble, trying to watch their backtrack? They're scared. Broad daylight, too!"

"Why don't the men take their guns and go after the beast?"

The snubbing post man had returned to his favorite position. He volunteered the statement:

"No mortal bullet, mister, can kill that critter. He's never seen 'cept by them he kills. It's always by night."

Four men were bearing their gruesome burden on a litter of poles. The onlookers slowly advanced to meet them. When the litter was within a hundred feet of the groggery the proprietor came to the door and commanded:

"Don't fetch it no closer. Can't have customers made squeamish along of something that can't be bettered."

One of the bearers, a tall, gaunt, loose jointed man, with no head covering except a shock of wiry black hair, came up to the silent group of staring loungers and said:

"Who, or what, done that devil's work oughter be hoppin' in hell this minute to the tune of all the devil's common doin's, such as redhot pitchforks in his innards." Then he swept his melancholy gaze up and down Gray's figure and inquired, "Who might you be, Mister Store Clothes?"

"English traveler; Gray by name... Queer how such bloody work can happen so close to civilization."

"Bah! Walk a mile into the brush an' you've left your civilization a mile behind. I'll plank down salvation agin a four-bit knife that if ever I meet the devil-critter, I'll see the innards of his hide."

"Huh!" warned the snubbing post man. "Bad times for loud talk."

"Mister, I'm a white Christun. I love folks. I give good for evil."

"That's better—a heap better."

"Yes, sirree! I'll give good for evil if I come up with that devil. I'll bury him!"

The groggery keeper demanded:

"Who might you be, mister? Jim Ford's run lots of tall men out of this country."

In a deep, solemn voice the tall man replied:

"Never talk to me in that way, mister. I'm Ramblin' Peevy, half rattlesnake, half wolf."

GRAY'S nerves gave a jump. In his linsey trousers, hunting shirt and moccasins, the man looked uncouth. Yet there was the promise of much tenacity in the sad, deepset eyes. The natives, satisfied no monster was nearby, surged forward to gaze upon a terrible sight, Peevy leading the way. Gray went along. The victim was horribly mutilated by claws such as never had been found on any carnivore of North America.

"It's Joel Bean!" cried the emigrant.

"He was talking about our poor houses," added the groggery keeper. "I said Cunnel Cassit had a big house that any town would be proud of. Reckon he went to prove I was a liar."

"His pockets was turned inside out," said one of the men who had brought the body to the landing.

The group was abruptly scattered by the jostling advance of a huge negro. He came to a halt before Peevy, glared insolently and proclaimed—

"I's one culled man, white man, what don' have no boss."

"You be, be you?" mumbled Peevy. "Reckon I'll lam you whiter'n my old mare—an' she was so white you couldn't see her in the daytime. Whose boy be you? Who give you fire-water?"

"I's my own boy, white man. I live with Cunnel Cassit. I's free."

"Not bein' property, you won't be missed much," said Peevy gently.

In the next moment he became a flurry of arms and legs; and Gray blinked in amazement that one of the negro's height and strength could be reduced to insensibility in such a brief period of time. Gazing about at the gaping spectators, Peevy explained:

"Just had to come the varmint over him. How can he be free?"

"Cunnel Cassit give him his freedom," answered the groggery keeper. "He won't like this business."

"Cunnel Cassit ain't goin' to have even a free black left if I let out another link. Found a Injun devil in my cabin once. Held by the throat with my left hand until I could light a candle an' take a good look at him. Then I booted him outdoors. Folks see him swimmin' the river to make the Injun shore. Never got a scratch."

He turned abruptly and made for the slab seat outside the groggery door. Gray followed and sat down beside him. Peevy eyed him with mournful eyes and sighed—

"Your pap oughter sent a older man."

"If I can't swing the job, we haven't any business to send others to try it."

"Bet my head agin a corn pone that that poor dead man never tore himself up like that. Son, I know the woods an' wild critters. No four-legged animal in the country that can give a man such a cruel come-uppance."

"You mean that a human being did that bloody work?"

"Human devil! He carried off two thousand dollars. While waitin' for you I scouted up 'n' down this river for miles. Found just one place that fretted me more than much. Big house, scant two miles down the road."

"Who owns it?"

"Same old Cunnel Cassit. Ask me, an' I'll preponderate it's a death trap. I'll bet a rainboy agin a yaller ribbon that the cunnel met the movers in the road near his place, talked with 'em, larned their plans, asked the dead man to call on him in the evenin'."

"Such talk is all guesswork, of course."

"Just as your eyesight an' hearin' is, yes. But no fools ever born yet in any Peevy fambly. Here's somethin' I ain't told. That poor man was shot through the head with a small bullet. All that maulin' was to hide the natur' of his death."

Gray was surprised by this disclosure. He said:

"Talk. You'll have to do lots of thinking for the two of us."

"Fair an' handsome! My pap give me a mule in his last will'n' testament an' 'lowed I was foot free to find my fortune. Moseyed round ever since, takin' care of myself in sort of a way. Never surrendered, much. When I come to a tough knot, I don't quit to find easier chawin'. I chaw out that knot. Big house oughter be looked into. My idee is to kill off what scum that's handy here an' then begin to bear down on the varmints harder 'n' harder as we go along."

"Any proof he was killed in the Cassit house?"

"That's my notion. But never bloodied up there. That happened outside. I 'low he went there, an' histed in some big brandy. Never any common ruin. Then he was follered an' shot an' clawed up most mortal— Huh? Wan't any moon last night. It was cloudy—so black you could read fine print by the light of a nigger's face. He couldn't 'a' been shot outdoors—in-

doors, where there was a light. But, says you, he was shot with a Kentucky rifle. You tripped me there. You argify the shooter must 'a' been outside the house. Dead center ag'in! Through a winder, of course—open winder. See how we're gittin' on, just by chawin' back an' forth?"

Gray nodded, although realizing he yet had to add anything to the web Peevy was spinning.

"He was took out the house, daid," continued Peevy. "Then Cassit must 'a' been in the know of it. Shot through an open winder while he was swiggin' big brandy in the big house. Body robbed of two thousand dollars; then fetched down the road an' clawed up."

"Then that house should be burned and the owner hanged!"

"Just as sure as Summer follers Winter. Son, you're all gallivanted out in store doin's. Folks think good clothes mean good dollars. Most of the native dollars are make-believe."

"Counterfeit?"

"Don't know if they count 'em. They ain't worth countin'. Mebbe they just heft 'em. Here's what I opine. You must be trap an' bait. Cassit will come here an' ask you to drop in an' gnaw a friendly bone. This evenin'. You be from England. No one here to git to fussin' 'long of you droppin' out. So, I opine, you're goin' to neighbor with Cassit quicker 'n my pap would swim the Cumberland for a bust-head of whisky. I'll be near. Not that you can't shift for yourself, but I'll be watchin'."

Horrified by the man's cold blooded logic, Gray hoarsely demanded—

"You actually mean that even a fiend would dare repeat last night's bloody business, and risk discovery by leaving me dead in the road?"

"What's the use of bein' a fiend if you can't act like one? That's the slant of the land."

"Then I promise you I will not go to his house."

"You're the most promisin' man for your age I ever met," sighed Peevy. "Now we go back to see how the rifleman was sure to find his target where he could nail him. Right you are; before a fireplace, of course. How'd the shooter be sartain he was pottin' the right man? Light shinin' so he could be seen in his chair? Dawggone, but you're quicker'n pap's old coondawg. Critter could bite himself in the face afore he could back away. How to stop all chances of a mistake? I give up! You're the beatenest younker I ever heard talk. There's only one lighted candle. It shines on the victim. Man outside shoots at what he can see. Small bullet. Nothin' noisy. No blood doin's. Then they blow out the one candle. Dead man toted out in the darkness. Must take your smartness from your ma an' pap.

"Now tell me some more. The two of you will be there alone. How can the cunnel be sure his man will stay quiet in his chair? I was goin' to ask that. I'd probably allow he's banged over the head with a club. But you've got the right of it when you say he must be asleep. Might be dull work, waitin' for him to sleep? Dead center ag'in. Man is given some sleep maker in his drink. Cunnel leaves the room—or stays. No candle over his head. That's the how of it."

"You must be doubly mad to think I would go there and then drink drugged wine!" exclaimed Gray.

"Reckon you can come nighest the truth, an' miss, of any man I ever met up with. But keep your shirt on, or go back to your pap."

Gray colored highly at the taunt, and haughtily replied—

"Men in my family aren't easily scared."

"Game as a mad wolf!" heartily indorsed Peevy. "You'll have all the advantage. For Cassit never will dream you're on to his game. So, all you'll have to do is to shift the drinks, an' let natur' take its course."

"But there may be no chance for that. I'll take my sword cane and a pistol."

"Cane, yes. No pistol. You'll be asked to call. I'll be there. We oughter have a good time. Where do we go next?"

"If we live through this night, we'll drop down the river in the broadhorn."

" 'Tween here an' Natchez we oughter have a heap of fun. I'm just honin' to let myself go an' act my bigness."

Gray started to speak, but Peevy stopped him, murmuring:

"Up the road! Gay buck with a cane, gold handle to it. It's Cassit of the big house. He'll fill your eye like a camel filled the eye of the needle in the Scripter. I'll pop inside an' wind myself round a few snorts of blue ruin. Mebbe I'll be prime drunk when he gits here."

With the elasticity of a released spring Peevy was through the door of the groggery.

CHAPTER III

WINE FOR TWO

CASSIT reflected nothing of the pioneer environment. His tall, erect figure was garbed in knee-breeches, a rich coat and a besprigged waistcoat. His hat was a fine beaver, and his stockings were never intended for a homespun country. There were men in the valley who would commit murder for his knee and shoe buckles alone. His appearance was reminiscent of the colonial days. One slim hand, half concealed by rich lace, grasped a goldheaded staff, which he sedately advanced with every other step. As he came to where Gray was sitting he halted, bowed low and swept off his hat with an old-time grace. His voice was most genial as he said:

"I give you good morning, young sir. I am Mr. Cassit. I live something over a mile up the road. When I learned from one of my servants that a young gentleman had arrived at this rather sorry place I promptly took the liberty of looking you up, sir."

"You are most polite, Mr. Cassit. I am Gregory Gray. It is a pleasure to meet a gentleman in this uncouth place. Be seated, please."

Cassit daintily dusted the slab with his handkerchief and sat down.

"You speak gently in saying 'uncouth'. It's barbarous. But I suppose all new country must seem uncouth to one paying his first visit to it. I frankly confess, sir, that I am very selfish in seeking your acquaintance. I actually am starved for intelligent companionship. My house is large and I am lonely. I am surrounded by coarseness, ignorance and superstition; the crude ore from which, several generations later, will come a refined metal. Too few travelers, like yourself, penetrate this raw country. You are the first English gentleman I have seen in years."

Before Gray could make a response Cassit continued:

"Tell me about your travels. Anything that's foreign to this raw life."

Gray talked in a desultory manner of what he had observed in the States, and with a touch of humor described his faring down the river. Mr. Cassit then said:

"You must dine with me this evening. You must be my guest, so long as you remain at this landing. Now, please, don't deny me. I am living on borrowed time...You seem to be posted on American affairs. Tell me how Mr. Monroe got to be President. Rufus King surely was a stanch Federalist."

"I can only repeat what your leaders have said in my hearing," said Gray. "Because of its opposition to the late war, the Federalist party has practically ceased to exist. That's why your Mr. Monroe received a hundred and eighty-three votes out of the two hundred and seventeen cast by your electorial college."

For twenty minutes Gray was kept

busy answering and asking questions. Much ground was covered, from Andrew Jackson's arbitrary conduct in the Creek War to Mr. Clay's success in carrying through the national program of military post roads and canals. Mr. Cassit reluctantly came to his feet.

"I have not had my answer. You will come?"

"It will be a great pleasure and privilege to spend the evening with you, sir. And I am naturally tempted by your kind offer of a civilized bed. But if I am faithfully to portray the life of your pioneers, I must partake of that life to a considerable extent. Suppose I drop in after dinner—or, as you Americans style it, supper?"

"As you will, of course. I wish you could tarry a few days, or weeks—indefinitely. Ah, to be young! To be going places! Never to sense the flight of time! Pardon an old man's maunderings. Until this evening, then."

"I thank you for your great politeness in looking me up."

Mr. Cassit walked briskly down the road, his sprightly bearing and quick steps in contrast to his silvery hair. After he had turned a bend in the road Peevy emerged from the groggery, a trifle unsteady of step. He slumped down beside Gray and crisply said—

"That feller won't never go to heaven."

"It's almost impossible to believe he isn't all that he appears."

"Your judgment ain't had time to git ripe. This minute you're reckonin' I've taken too many whisky doin's aboard. I can stand on my head an' play a fiddle. I ain't no scollard, but I can read big print. I'll pike off afoot to Kingdom Come if I ain't read that Cassit critter from kiver to kiver. Jim Ford takes orders from Cassit."

"The leader of the whole outfit," mused Gray.

"No. There's some one down the river, somewhere, who gives orders to Cassit. We'll find that big boss, an' I'll be thicker with him than first cousins."

"I'm taking orders from you. I'll call on Cassit after supper."

"An' don't be skeered. If you be, don't show it. I'll be close by. You're just bait."

A group of rivermen came out of the groggery and Peevy quickly joined them and loudly offered to race or wrestle any man—for fun or hard money. He boasted of killing a big tree cat with one hand. To further impress them he added:

"I'm so quick I can dodge lightnin'. Done it onct to win a bet. Stood on a outcroppin' of iron ore in a thunderstorm. Dodged twenty bolts in a ten-foot circle."

Although he had no liking for the adventure ahead of him, Gray found the time passing slowly. He ate an early supper, and an hour after sunset he was walking down the gloomy road, sword cane in hand. A suspicious noise in the virgin growth startled him. It was Peevy, his tall, gaunt figure easily recognizable even in the gathering darkness. Peevy came closer and encouraged:

"I'll be there. If I was fifty miles away, I'd make it. I can outrun all creation an' give it ten miles' start. Remember, we don't surrender, much. Don't forgit to smile."

GRAY'S shoulders squared as a burden of apprehension dropped from him. He was whistling a sprightly tune and twirling his cane as he came up to the big house. It was set back in a grove of ancient trees. As he extended a hand to sound the brass knocker, the door opened and his host stood there, voicing a hearty greeting. He had changed to a suit of black velvet, with jeweled buckles at the knees. He wore a brooch of precious stones at the throat of his ruffled shirt. His fingers glittered with rings, and fine old lace nearly concealed the long, slim hands. Gray stood his cane in a corner and expressed the fear that he had arrived too early.

"I'm starved for contact with civilized human beings," Cassit assured him as he ushered his guest to the fireplace, which was ablaze with hickory logs, although the evening was mild.

When both were seated, with the fireplace between them, Cassit loosed a volley of eager questions. What was the nation to do with Jackson and his ambitions? What cloak would the Federalist party next wear? Would England hold France to account for selling the Louisiana country? . . . If not for the potentialities of stark tragedy, Gray would have been greatly entertained by his host's shrewdness. The man's knowledge was embarrassing when he took up the political questions of Europe. At one point, when his host paused, Gray remarked:

"Safety for travelers and home seekers in the more exposed regions of this country must be guaranteed if the nation is to profit by Louisiana."

"That's it! We must protect the settler, or leave this magnificent realm to wild animals, Indians and white ruffians. It will require several generations of explorers to learn the true bigness of this Western world. I fear our title will be challenged by your England, France, and possibly Spain. We are imperiled by the land we claim, but do not need and can not defend."

For an hour Cassit revealed the sprightly inquisitiveness of a child and the close reasoning of a philosopher. His scholarly language and his great fund of general information caused Gray to wonder if Ramblin' Peevy's suspicion could be correct. To all appearances the man was a well-to-do and highly intelligent recluse.

Then like a splash of icy water Peevy's prophecy was recalled. Cassit tapped a small gong. Almost immediately a huge negro in bright livery entered. He brought a tray on which were two glasses of wine and a decanter. When Gray glimpsed the dark face he saw the servant was the man who had aroused Peevy's ire at the groggery.

The tray was deposited on a taboret between the two men. Cassit was beaming hospitably. It was hard for Gray to believe that the wine nearest his hand was aught but honest drink. Nor did he believe it possible to shift the glasses unperceived. Cassit was silent for a moment, and his guest, for the first time, noticed something which might be construed to sustain Peevy's predictions. Either the firelight, or some emotion, caused Cassit's eyes to glisten. For an instant it seemed as if the eyes were laughing.

Gray realized he must shift the positions of the glasses, or spill his wine, and must do so at once. The few seconds the two were silent seemed to Gray to be many minutes. If he spilled the wine, another glass would be brought. As he was about to refuse the drink, Cassit himself provided the opportunity for some simple sleight-of-hand. He complained half aloud of the light on his side. He rose and extinguished it. Then with a smile and bow he picked up the nearest glass, and murmured—

"I give you a gentle faring, let your journey be ever so long."

"I thank you, sir, for your kind sentiment. To your health. May it ever be as substantial as is your hospitality." Gray bowed low and both drank. As he replaced his glass he remarked, "A fine vintage, sir. You are fortunate."

"A most remarkable vintage," said Cassit. "The bouquet is delightful. But its greatest virtue, you will find, is its inducement for one to abandon all worldly cares. You should feel it warming your blood and giving a delicious sense of irresponsibility. Perhaps an inclination to drowse a bit."

With an apologetic laugh, Gray confessed:

"Really, I feel a bit sleepy already—as if I hadn't a care, or fear, in the whole world. Oddly, I'm graceless enough not to feel ashamed of this drowsy feeling."

Cassit pressed his lips tightly together. He slowly turned his head as if making

a superhuman effort, and stared up at the extinguished candle.

"You would have it lighted?" asked Gray.

He arose and renewed the flame from his own taper, and tossed the latter into the fireplace.

CASSIT'S face became convulsed. The high forehead glistened with perspiration. He managed to whisper—

"Blow out the light!" He endeavored to stand, but was like an insect impaled on a pin. "Blow—light—"

With his heart pounding rapidly because of the tragedy of the situation, Gray whispered—

"You feel ill?"

"Blow out—" came faintly from between the blanched lips.

From outside came the sharp crack of a rifle, no louder than the crack of a carter's whip. Cassit's features smoothed out in a placid expression. His blue eyes remained open and staring. Gray leaped to the half open window, just as Peevy showed his head to exclaim—

"Pike out quicker'n old Satan can wag his forked tail!"

Gray turned and secured his sword cane, then slipped out into the night.

"I never oughter let you go in there. 'Twas my job, but I wasn't asked. I ain't got no fambly, which is mighty lucky for the fambly. But I've been watchin' you two, ready to hop in." As he spoke he was drawing his companion to the rear of the house.

"This isn't the way to the river," remonstrated Gray.

"That shooter is goin' to travel ahead of us. Reckon it's the nigger. Derned clever idea. Just the top of your heads showin'. Rather, his'n, not yours. The shooter prob'ly gits so much a shot. Hope he saves his money . . . Now to go through the house."

Gray, physically and mentally upset by the gruesome business, insisted they not risk being found in the house.

"Sssh! The winder!" whispered the Tennessee man.

The big black was standing in the doorway of the ill fated room, his eyes wide with amazement, fear and rage.

"Gorry mighty! What did de massa boss squat under de can'le for?"

Peevy clutched Gray's wrist and led him hurriedly to the rear door. Passing through a short hall, the two found themselves in the cook room. A candle dimly lighted the room. They were barely across the threshold when the door to the serving pantry opened, and the negro stood gaping at them. The big black fastened his gaze on Gray and shouted:

"I's de debbil! I's debbil-claw you-un!"

From the side pocket of his long coat of livery he yanked forth a peculiarly hideous weapon, an iron glove, with the fingers so many terrible claws. Into this he thrust his right hand. Peevy swung Gray behind him with a sweep of his powerful arm and snatched the sword cane from his hand. With his left he yanked out a long knife. In a voice that rasped he said:

"So you're the devil-cat! You killed an' mauled that poor lad last night!"

"An' I's goin' debbil-claw you-un, white trash!" roared the black.

He leaped forward and with his left hand grasped the extended cane. He bellowed in triumph as he secured the wooden scabbard. His tone changed to a shrill squeal of terror as he beheld the long steel blade which he had unsheathed. He could not retreat. He swung his long arm and leaped to get inside Peevy's guard. Instead he walked into the point, to be transfixed by the slim blade, dying on his feet. The impact of his heavy body striking the floor seemed to shake the building.

"Oh, Lord! What a terrible night!" cried Gray. "We must get away from this fearful place. They'll blame us for the two killings. We must drop down the river."

"Of course," agreed Peevy. "But

first we'll snoop 'round and see if Cassit kept any papers about this bloody business."

Against his will, Gray went with him to the living room where his host appeared to be steadily watching them from his deep chair. In a narrow cupboard Peevy found a package of papers which he ran through with surprising astuteness, for one who appeared to be so illiterate. He told his nervous companion:

"These all hitch up with piratin', to any one in the know. Read that line—" Gray read:

> Our young Mr. Gray will arrive shortly. Show him the usual hospitality.

He could not identify the writing. Peevy said:

"We must be afloat afore sunrise. But we ought to have a snack of food first."

"Good heavens! Eat in this house! Food cooked by that black monster!" whispered Gray, as he edged toward the door.

"I didn't mean anything finnified," Peevy explained. "Just some common doin's, like wild turkey, hominy, corn pone, mebbe some fritters, with cider or a snort of New England rum. I ate two crows once. Not so bad. On t'other hand, they was bad 'nough."

CHAPTER IV

TROUBLED WATERS

TRADE was brisk at the groggery when Ramblin' Peevy and young Gray entered. That the latter apparently was at his ease was due to his companion's insistence that he walk slowly and rid himself of any signs of having hurried. Lane, the clerk, sat in a corner with a tallow dip and the last edition of Cramer's "Navigator". While Peevy ranged up to the bar and called for "big doin's" in liquor, Gray joined the clerk and, under his breath, said:

"We must get away at once. I'll explain our hurry to you later."

Lane nodded and continued reading. As Gray passed out into the night he heard his tall friend declaring:

"I'm glad I'm poor. All the Bible promises be for the poor man. Only the rich man has to pass through the eye of the needle, an' you all know that no matter how rich a man is he can't do that. I've got a piece of hard money. I'm goin' to trade it for quenchers. Any one with throat sickness come forward an' be cured in a sort of a way."

All rushed to the bar, and Lane slipped through the door and hurried to the flatboat. The lighted candle showing through the little window of the deckhouse told him his passenger was aboard. When he entered the cabin Bim was whetting his knife. The clerk said—

"You're making a sudden change in your plans."

Gray glanced at the eccentric.

"Talk as if he was on t'other side of the world. Plumb crazy, you know."

"Cassit was shot dead while sitting across the fireplace from me."

"Dead? Good heavens! Who did it?"

"The big black. Fired through the open window. He supposed the man under the candle was I. Cassit was one of the band. Found papers which shows he knew I was coming. The black was to have killed me. I'll explain it all later."

"Talk till Peevy comes. Begin at the beginning and tell the whole story."

Gray rapidly sketched the plans for exterminating the river pirates. When he had finished, Lane uneasily inquired—

"But where's the big black?"

After Gray had described the fight in the cook room, Lane muttered:

"What a stir it will make! I must write a report to Colonel Pointer at once. You'll have time to write your father."

"No. It would worry him. Tell the colonel it's my desire that he tell my

father nothing. But we must be far downstream before the discovery is made. If I believed it would be safe to wait till the first light— Hark!"

"I hear nothing," nervously murmured Lane.

"Now you can hear it."

Lane thrust his head through the small window. He caught it—the voices of men sounding an alarm down the Pickering Hill road. Then a man leaped aboard the flat, and his long body crowded through the low entrance.

"Slip your line! I'd give a quart of blood to know we was beyond Cave-in Rock. Lane, we'll boom downstream like a bat in Winter flannels a-flukin' out of hell. I teached Noah how to sail the first ark. I know this river even when she's blacker'n the insides of a nigger's ribs. Moon bustin' through the clouds. I'll take you through."

Peevy left the cabin and threw off the shore line. With a mighty shove of a long pole he sent the flat out into the current. Next he was dragging the eccentric to an oar, while he seized the other, leaving Lane to handle the stern oar. Gray blew out the candle so as not to invite a rifle bullet. As the craft caught the full force of the current, several men ran whooping from the road to the groggery.

Lane was worried. He said:

"I'll be blamed. That means the river scum will capture every Pointer boat they can."

From midstream the current took the broadhorn back toward the Kentucky shore. Gray expressed a fear of grounding. The Tennessee man caustically replied:

"You leave the boat alone an' you leave the current alone. Current knows where it's headin'. You set yourself up as knowin' more than the current does, an' you'll be as unlucky as a one armed man tryin' to scratch in two places at once."

The river soon was a silver avenue, glorious in the moonlight. Each time Gray feared the broad would run aground, it swung around with the current and bobbed on. He wondered what luck was rushing up the river to meet them. For now he experienced the hallucination of being stationary, with the great silver ribbon being pulled up and under the broadhorn. He knew that within another mile they would be passing the cave, the infamous lair of the Harpes and Masons and other bloody scoundrels. His heart beat more rapidly as a cloud blotted the moon for a bit, while the boat lurched on. The light returned when the voyagers were within a half mile of the cave.

"Shall we land?" called out Lane to Peevy. "Company in the cave. I can see the light of their fire on the water."

"Sliver by!" cried Peevy. "I ain't lost no light."

They passed through the beam of light from the cave and entered the velvet darkness below, without attracting the attention of those ashore. Then the whimsical current was again hurrying them toward the Kentucky shore, which for two miles was a high and forbidding bluff. Just when Gray believed they must pile up, the craft swung about and sedately drifted downstream. It was such a game as Gray had never dreamed. What with bars and islands, snags and logs and shoals, it did not seem possible the awkward craft could get through. The technique seemed to consist solely of keeping the broad in the current.

The next ordeal was Hurricane Island, once the hangout of the notorious Wilson gang. The danger of grounding on this barrier seemed so imminent that Peevy growled angrily. A few minutes later he suddenly called through the window for Gray to blow out the candle.

"We're bein' chased!" he announced sharply.

GRAY looked back and beheld a bobbing speck of light. A rifle cracked and a bullet singing over his head caused him to drop flat on his face. Peevy emitted a shrill cry of rage, and would

have abandoned his long oar had not Gray called out—

"Didn't come anywhere near me!"

The flat behind again blazed with gunfire. Peevy had Gray take his oar for a moment. He drew Bim's musket through the cabin window. He discharged it at the bobbing light. A yell of pain floated down the river and the light vanished. Peevy, who had been knocked flat by the rebound of the piece, crawled to his feet and groaned:

"Damme! He's been loadin' that gun ever since the Revolution an' ain't fired it once. Knocked me plumb out of my leathers."

The light of the pursuing boat did not show again; nor were they again fired upon. Peevy's and Lane's river knowledge permitted the broadhorn to thread its way for a mile and a half through all obstacles, the first of the Three Sisters Islands and to the empty Lusk Ferry landing, where emigrants for Kaskaskia and St. Louis crossed over from Kentucky. Gray knew that Lane was much worried. He took Peevy aside and suggested:

"Let's tell Lane to take Bim on down the river about the colonel's business. We can't learn things if we have to keep on the run. Lane mustn't be endangered by our company."

"He can cross us to the Kentucky shore. Seem like home to git back in the woods with b'ars an' wolves."

Gray promptly informed Lane of the new plan. He obviously was relieved. He was quick to say:

"Speck upriver. Must be the flat that's chased us. I'll cross you now and get out of their reach."

In another minute the broad was wallowing over to the south bank and, with a hasty handclasp, Lane and the eccentric were again afloat. Once in an ancient Shawnee path, leading to the west, Peevy decided it would be unwise for his friend to maintain longer the rôle of an English traveler. Gray readily agreed and did his part in earning a new identity.

For nearly a week the men followed the various trails. A radical metamorphosis was effected in Gray's appearance. At widely separated farmhouses Peevy traded for various garments, with Gray remaining in the woods. Nor did the Southerner neglect to change his own outward appearance. By the time the two men had reached the mouth of the Cumberland, Gray senior would not have recognized his son. The latter had the beginning of a beard, his hair was long and disheveled and his hands and face were none too clean. He wore jeans and moccasins, a short coat of squirrel skins and a hat of the same material. He even had acquired the lazy, lounging gait of a woods runner. Peevy's long upper lip had sprouted a ragged mustache and the strong chin was bristly with reddish whiskers. Each wore a long knife and carried a rifle. On the first day of their journey the sword cane was buried in the forest mold.

But one defect in the younger man remained to be cured. Peevy criticized it.

"You talk like you was makin' a speech to Angel Gabriel on a rainy day. Remember, you was raised over in Bledso. I'm your pap. You-un don't set yourself up to be better'n your old man. Git the knack of not usin' double jinted words. I'll do most of the talkin; you do the gawpin'. You're a igerant young hound. Open your mouth an' gawp. No! Jaw must sag sort of loose."

For a shilling Peevy hired a boatman to ferry them across the three hundred yards of blue water. The man promptly asked their names, their home and the nature of their business. Peevy gravely told him:

"We come in a chariot of fire. We're huntin' for the gold the man in the moon hid in these parts during the Creek War."

The boatman made every effort to get them ashore. There were some two dozen houses in the settlement, and the two taverns bespoke of much transient

travel. There were but few gardens, although the soil was excellent for crops and grazing. The very atmosphere of the place indicated that the community had few interests aside from the river trade. After landing, Peevy said:

"We're keen to buy a small flat an' poke off down the Mississip'. This is a mighty big place for you. Keep your mouth open most of the time. We'll need two prime men—"

"Hi, pap," softly interrupted Gray, "there's a prime hand now, on your right."

Peevy turned his head and beheld Bim, near a large warehouse, faithfully going through the manual of arms. Grinning onlookers were watching him. Peevy admiringly said:

"Old coot never lets weather, low water or fresh keep him from his knittin'. Drop him in the moon, in one of them black spots, where niggers go when they die, an' I opine the first thing he'd do would be to git busy with that old musket. Worth half a dozen river scum if he'll jine us."

"He may prefer to remain here."

"Hell's chickens! Be you, or be you not, a igerant young squirrel hunter?" growled Peevy. "Step on your tongue. Stop highfalutin with words. Sag that jaw as natur' planned, or it wouldn't work on a hinge. Gawp at the warehouse. Biggest house you ever seen. I'll cut across Bim's bow an' take him in tow."

Gray was still "gawpin' " when Peevy returned to report:

"He's fit as a fiddle. But that derned gun's loaded most to the muzzle. When he fires it, it'll knock him back into his second childhood. Seems he's gittin' ready to kill the devil. I 'lowed there was right pert devil huntin' down the big river. He 'lowed he's keen to fetch along with us. Tag along while I find a flat. Got to be much stouter than a boat for the Ohio trade. Must be stronger built, calked better, much higher all around, an' have longer an' stronger cables."

After examining several craft, a thirty-footer was finally selected. It was six feet wide and three feet deep, with the "house" raised three feet above the deck. It could be navigated downstream with a minimum of effort. Bacon and other supplies were stowed aboard. Peevy told Gray:

"While I'm finishin' up odds an' ends, you travel round. You hanker to see the sights. You never been nowhere, nor seen nothin' before."

Gray obediently roamed about the settlement, and finished by visiting the two taverns. His expression of stupidity made him the target of much rough badinage. In the barroom of the second tavern he found the company rough and vicious, rather than merely boisterous. The room boasted a billiard table, and Gray leaned against it and picked up one of the balls. A player roared a curse and hurled a ball at the meddler's head. Gray dodged it by the narrowest margin; and his gorge rose as he saw the man grab for another sphere. He was quicker than his assailant, and hurled a ball which hit the man on the head, knocking him senseless.

INSTANTLY the room was in an uproar, and a general rush was made to manhandle the stranger. Gray was attempting to get to the door when he was flung to one side, and Peevy was standing between him and his enemies. With the screech of a catamount the Tennesseean dropped his long rifle and hurled himself at the group. For a brief period there was a blur of arms and legs. When quiet was restored, Peevy was the only man erect. He announced:

"My younker is sorter simple in the head, but he ain't to be put upon. Next time I'll plumb forgit my town manners an' act rough."

From the doorway a deep voice called—

"S'pose you act up rough with me."

Peevy wheeled and beheld a tall,

strongly built man, who was in the act of drawing a knife. Peevy tossed his gun to Gray and snapped:

"Keep 'em back. This critter's my meat!"

Gray stood by the wall and covered the loungers, who were now groaning and cursing and crawling to their feet. He shifted his gaze for a second as the combatants crashed against the bar, each gripping the other's knife hand. One of the spectators leaped forward to strike Peevy with the butt of a billiard cue. Gray, with a lucky shot, sent a bullet through the man's wrist. Leaning the rifle against the wall, he took his own weapon and yelled—

"I'll keep 'em quiet, pap!"

Peevy thrust his shaggy head under his opponent's left arm and, without releasing his grip on the enemy's knife hand, he heaved his strong shoulders and used a knee and the two men rolled over and behind the bar. Gray feared his heart would burst, so heavily did it pound. Horrible sounds came from behind the bar. Gray, with his rifle lined against the men at the end of the room, felt nauseated as he pictured what terrible slaughter was being done. Some of the hardened ruffians exclaimed in horror as long hanks of hair came sailing over the bar.

Then Peevy stood erect, grinning broadly. Breathing a bit heavily, he told the rough company—

"Ain't had a better ring rassle since I fought two b'ars up there nigh Bledso."

With that he reached down, seized his opponent and brought him up and across the bar as limp as a bag of meal. Gray laughed hysterically as he discovered that the man's long hair had been cut off in patches close to the scalp, but without any injury having been inflicted. Peevy vaulted lightly over the bar and told the dazed spectators:

"Done it without fetchin' a drop of blood. You folks be here after supper an' we'll have some good, old fashioned fun. Come along, son."

Once they were clear of the building, Peevy explained—

"Sorry I had to choke him a trifle, but he seemed to lose his temper."

"I thought you'd scalped him."

"Job wan't clean enough for that. Just hacked off a few lovelocks. Now to find Bim. I was braggin' when I 'lowed I'd go in there tonight. They'll be brave enough to shoot us after it gits dark. Us for down the river. Everything is aboard, even a few whisky doin's."

They found Bim waiting, the long steering oar ready. The line was cast off and the flat buoyantly began its long slide down the seven hundred and fifty-odd miles to the Natchez landing. The first leg of the journey was of brief duration. When seven miles down the river, now grown very muddy, Peevy scanned the heavens and spoke to Bim. The latter looked up at the dark clouds and promptly ran the boat under a willow. Peevy made the mooring cable fast.

Only a murky light remained. The river was suddenly leaping into a rare commotion. The thunder rolled and rumbled most ominously, and lightning stitched the heavens and brightly illuminated the scene. Then came the rain, driven like bullets. It was a tornado in fury. The water was lifted by the wind, then pounded down in a flat smother of spume. For thirty minutes the storm raged, with the flat striving to break loose and race along with it.

It ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun. The light returned. Gray emerged from the deckhouse, glanced astern and said:

"That boat rode it through."

He was staring upriver at a big flat. Peevy nudged him and murmured:

"My eyes are like a eagle's. Man forward is the cuss I sculped. We'll stick right here till mornin'. But that flat's made of stout timber."

The big boat crashed by, and when opposite the willow, the man with the shorn head spied and recognized Peevy.

He snatched up a rifle and fired. With a yell of rage Peevy secured his rifle, but by that time the stern of the big craft was passing. Peevy vowed:

"I'll pay him for that shot if we ever meet up. He can't grow a new head of hair in a hurry."

Shortly before sunrise the three men were afloat, and Gray saw his first cypress on the Ohio. Near midday they were passing old Fort Massac on the right bank. It happened that a captain's command was at drill. Bim, sighting the soldiers, promptly abandoned his long sweep and secured his musket, to go through his military exercises. This section of the river afforded the most noble view Gray had yet enjoyed. For nearly a dozen miles one could look up the wide flood, while ahead some five miles of scenic charms were rushing upstream to meet the voyagers.

Peevy, eminently practical, gave no time to scenery. When he could snatch a few minutes from his long oar he studied the "Navigator." When he announced they would tie up for the night at Wilsonville, eighteen miles below Massac, Bim wildly urged:

"Go on! Go on! Dead men walk there!"

It was so seldom the eccentric spoke, his wild speech caused Gray some uneasiness. He formed a sudden dislike for what once was a thriving community, now desolation. He said as much to Peevy.

"Fine cap'n I be, if that old coot can tell me where to tie up and where I mustn't," growled Peevy. "His addled pate remembers when a big killin' was made there, when the French held the fort. Injuns, covered with bear pelts, decoyed the whole post out to shoot fresh meat. 'Nother parcel of reds snucked in the back way an' butchered the whole garrison. Four miles of rocks begin there. No rock doin's for me."

"Dead men! Dead men in the moonlight walkin'!" Bim repeated over and over, as if it were a chant.

"If you can make him shet up," cried Peevy, "we'll run four miles farther an' tie up. But he's got to git it through his sick head that I don't surrender much."

GRAY was disappointed in his first view of the Mississippi. He did not approve of the turbid appearance of the water, while a large island in the middle of the river spoiled what otherwise would have been a magnificent view upstream. He was surprised when told that the channel rarely was a mile wide. Not until more than two hundred miles below the mouth of the Ohio did he and his partner get a thrill entirely apart from the ordinary hazards. They were saving eight miles by risking the inside passage of President's Island, near the left bank, when Bim pointed at what appeared to be a big placard, made fast to a water maple. The river was high and the cut-off was safe. As the flat entered the passage the voyagers read the disturbing announcement—

GRAY AND PEEVY WANTED AT H'DQUARTERS.

—X. B.

"Land sake!" exclaimed Gray. "How could any one know we were coming downriver?"

"They knew we started," Peevy reminded. "But they'd never know you in them clothes, hair an' whisker doin's."

A vague fear of the flowing road got on Gray's nerves after that discovery. Three miles below President's Island Peevy announced they would tie up in a little cove beyond a willow point. Gray leaped ashore with the line and made fast, and then stood staring. Peevy called out—

"Sun struck or frost bitten?"

"Another of those X.B. signs."

"The scuts must 'a' posted the whole danged river. Sort of creepy to find one in a lonesome place like this."

He wheeled nervously at a shrill voice from a point up the shore. He snatched up his rifle and weaved back and forth.

"Show your hide, or catch a lead pill in your vitals!"

The bush growth was agitated; then a skiff nosed into view and came down toward the flat. Peevy lowered his gun on beholding the one figure. Gray exclaimed—

"It's a boy!"

His error was natural. When the skiff came alongside the occupant stood no taller than a lad of eight. The shoulders were very broad, however, and the disproportion was further accentuated by the hump on the back. Catching the shore line the unfortunate creature requested:

"Give me a lift down to Natchez, if you're going that far. I'll give you this skiff and work the sweeps. I'm John the Pedler. Guess every one has heard of me."

Peevy shook his head and said:

"Men who guess usually come from New England. Critter from up there sold me a clock onct. I'm still lookin' for him."

"You hit it plumb center. Born in Vermont. What say, do we trade? To Natchez, and you keep my boat."

"You're welcome to a ride as far as we go. We don't know how far that will be. Keep your boat. We've got one."

"Thanks."

The pedler picked up a big pack with one hand and tossed it on to the deck. It gave forth a clinking sound. Peevy and Gray exchanged glances, marveling at the uncouth creature's great strength. Peevy remarked:

"You remind me of my wife's cousin. Had to go barefoot, he was so strong. Ever' time he'd pull on a boot his foot would bust right through it. Hitch the skiff behind. Take it with you when you go. Man, what shoulders!".

"All there is to me—arms and shoulders." Then he exclaimed. "What's that sign say? If somebody is having an auction I may back out and pick up some bargains."

"Sign puzzles us," said Peevy.

But the pedler did not seem to hear him. He was staring at Bim, who was going through his manual again.

"He's drilling for the next war," gravely explained Peevy. "Gits behind by spells."

"Cuss me pink!" exclaimed the pedler. "He's a rare one!" He lifted his brows and tapped his head.

"Fine hand on a flat, but he has his spells," said Peevy. Then, with backwoods curiosity, he asked, "What you got in that bag?"

"Jewelry and fine notions," was the prompt reply.

The pedler proceeded to invite trade by displaying some pinchbeck jewelry and several rings of gold. In his stock were two unusually fine watches.

Gray picked up one of the rings and read inside the band: "A.L. to G.M."

The pedler was quick to notice the frown on the young man's face, and explained:

"Fellow bought it to give his girl. Had those letters put in. Then I had to take it back as he couldn't pay."

"Busted up a courtship along of a few dollars," growled Peevy.

"I have to pay for everything I get. Folks must pay me. I can't eat, or wear sentiment."

"I s'pose that's so. You have to live, I reckon. Four of them rings are real gold. All been worn quite a bit."

"You're keen. You're smart." The pedler chuckled. "But you know folks don't always value what they've had for a long time. They want something new, and they'll trade in for this other stuff."

Peevy glanced at the pinchbeck and said—

"Brass doin's."

"It does look like brass," admitted the pedler. "But I can doctor the stuff so it'll look like pure gold. Especially in candlelight. You see, I am not trying any trade games on you folks. You're

smart. I couldn't take you in—yet that queer old coot . . ."

He paused and stared speculatively at Bim; then shook his head as if putting temptation from him, and sighed:

"It wouldn't be honest cheating. When we going to pull out?"

"Prob'ly in the mornin'. This is one of our lazy days, an' Bim wants to git some drillin' saved up ahead agin a lean spell."

The pedler cocked his head as if listening, and said:

"I'm keen to reach Natchez. I'll give you ten dollars in hard money if you'll start now."

"No safe night travel till we get to Natchez," spoke up Gray.

"Hush!" warned Peevy, and he tilted his head and listened. "Reckon I hear dawgs. Be they on your track, mister?"

"The fools must have rubbed their new rings to make them shine more, and rubbed through the delicate coating. They'll be hell hooting down to this shore and shooting guns in a few minutes."

PEEVY leaped ashore and cast off. Regaining the flat, he crisply ordered the pedler to take his bag inside the little deckhouse and remain out of sight. Then the three men worked the flat into the strong current and went bobbing down the inside channel. They had covered a quarter of a mile when a posse of men and three dogs broke from cover at the point where the pedler had put off in the skiff. They shouted and waved their guns. Peevy waved his hand. The flat drifted around a point and the posse was lost to view.

Near dusk, and some ten miles below their first landing, the flat was worked into a cove, where a rough road led up over a ridge. Peevy surprised the pedler by telling him:

"Here's a mighty good place for you to say goodby to us. Them gold rings an' watches don't set well on my stummick, as the whale told Jonah. You can take to the road, or float downstream in your skiff. I'm goin' up the ridge after vittle doin's."

The pedler lowered, but said nothing. He lost no time in swinging down into the skiff. Instead of making for the landing, his powerful arms and shoulders sent the craft dancing along the shore and gradually out into the four-mile current. Peevy ordered Bim to remain on the boat and warned Gray to keep a sharp watch. Then he was off up the road.

Reaching the crest of the ridge, he soon came to a little settlement of a dozen houses, a church, a tavern and a store. It was dusk. Several horsemen were galloping into the eastern end of the one street as Peevy lounged into the store. He bought bacon, potatoes and other staple supplies. He was conscious of the loungers' curious gaze. As he paid over his money the door flew violently open and three men tramped in. One of them loudly announced:

"Bloody murder has been done over at Biggets Town. Old Jason was found dead from stab wounds an' the house ransacked. It's known that the murderer got two thousand dollars in gold besides several rings an' two watches. Our men are gallopin' south along the ridge to spread the news at every village. We believe the sneakin', cowardly killer come up from the river."

"How many was in it?" asked a lounger.

"We believe there was two. But maybe one man did it. Old Jason is dead. We're positive of that much."

The speaker sighted Peevy, standing by the counter with his purchases, and he eyed him suspiciously. Stepping between the Tennesseean and the door, he approached him and demanded:

"Who are you? What's your business? Where did you come from?"

Peevy instantly sensed the danger of the situation. There was no law along the Mississippi; it was common for an irate citizenry to lynch offenders. Peevy swung up on the counter, his

purchases in his arms, and explained:

"I'm from Tennessee. Name of Peevy."

Another of the horsemen cried—

"There's a sign near our landin' that says a man of that name is wanted.

The first speaker slapped a hand on the pistol in his belt.

"You'll go back with us to Biggets Town, mister. You're wanted most powerful there."

"You men are makin' a mistake. You're wastin' time enough to let the real thief an' murderer escape. But git me a horse. I ain't goin' to walk to Biggets Town."

The leader turned to the storekeeper and said:

"You find a nag for this man to ride. Be sharp about it."

During the brief time in which the man was giving the order, Peevy swung his legs over the counter and leaped for the window. Turning and ducking his head, he jumped backward, crashing through sash and glass. In another moment he was running softly through the gathering darkness and circling around to strike into the river path. He was halfway down the slope before he heard the first gun fired, and he fancied he heard the swish of bullets. He recklessly dashed on, with his pursuers giving chase afoot. At the outset he had dropped his purchases.

"Cast off, Gray! Cast off!" he shouted, as he caught the reflection of the deck lantern on the black water.

The light began to move, but the gap was not too wide to deter Peevy from successfully making the leap. As his moccasins smacked loudly on the deck, his first act was to extinguish the lantern. His next move was to seize the long steering oar and send the flat floating into the dark shadows of the wooded shore.

Guns were soon banging loudly from the landing, but the men were firing at random. As the noise of the shouting and shooting lessened, the flat was worked into midstream and dropped down the long water lane more rapidly. Bim pushed Peevy aside and took the long sweep. Gray excitedly demanded an explanation. Peevy told of the murder and added—

"Must 'a' been our pedler."

Gray was worried. He anxiously asked:

"But what can we do? We'll run on to a snag and be hung up, perhaps drowned. By this time the horsemen are spreading the alarm far down the river."

"We must work across t'other side an' take our luck as it comes along. If we tie up, we'll find folks will be watchin' for us on both shores. We must git as far as possible down the rivre before daylight."

"The horsemen, by relays, can cover a hundred miles before sunrise."

"I don't plan to be company for any lynchin' party. It was darkish in the store. They couldn't see me good. But I was fool enough to give my name, an' they'd seen one of them cussed signs near the landin'. They reckon we're wanted by the law, instead of by outlaws. But we don't surrender, much. When the flat can't serve us, we'll take to the skiff. When the skiff gives out we'll hold our breath an' walk on the bottom of this river."

Floating down the river in the darkness was extremely hazardous. Nor did they dare hang the usual lantern at the stern. They saw a light twinkling along the east bank and believed some Biggets Town citizens had taken to the river.

Bim seemed to sense their peril, and several times his remarkable knowledge of the river saved the three of them from a catastrophe.

With the first light of morning they found they were dangerously close to the western bank. They were seen, for rifles cracked and a skiff put out, but soon turned back. Peevy pointed to a cleared section of the ridge, where horsemen were galloping through the glory of the rising sun . . .

THERE followed days of monotonous drifting. Gray listened to Peevy's reminiscences of the noble highway, some historical and much apocryphal. At times, when between two bends, they seemed the only humans on the river. Then a wider vista, with no islands to block the gaze, and the little flat would become one of many. Songs and musical instruments, drunken shouting, and the raucous dissonance of floating barnyards would sound above the murmurous voice of the river.

Out of the north floated a solitary traveler in a dugout. His appearance alongside the flat was startling. He was fairly abreast when Bim called attention to his strange appearance by pointing and staring. The traveler was dead. He had been scalped. Peevy looked closely and said:

"White Injun done that. Nary a red raised his hair." The barrel of a broken musket suggested a stout defense. "River pirates got him," Peevy added.

Against his will, Gray pulled the boat alongside and hurriedly examined the clothing of the dead man. The pockets were empty. But on the stock of the gun was a possible identification. In the wood had been burned, "Jno. Clouds gun."

Peevy and Gray discussed the probability of determined avengers of the Biggets Town murder having gone on to the crescent shaped cove forming Natchez Landing. To guard against possible identification, Peevy decided to leave the flat on the Louisiana side, hidden among the cane and overhanging foliage of some islet, and to cross in the skiff. Gray indorsed the plan.

"They had a good look at the flat. They'll be watching for three men to arrive on such a boat."

"After we've fetched the landin'," added Peevy, "we won't keep together for a bit—or till I'm sartin no one is gunnin' us. I can give the devil both underholds an' flatten him on his back, but I don't hone to have him jump me from behind. None of my old Ohio friends will know us in all these whiskers an' long hair doin's."

Gray appreciated the generosity of this ruse, inasmuch as Peevy alone had been seen by the posse. The flat was soon made secure, deep in the backwater and near a small hummock, and the skiff was maneuvered so as to land at the lower end of the cove.

The three mingled with the motley gathering, which characterized the waterfront of Natchez-Under-the-Hill, and attracted no attention that they could detect. Drink shops, gambling places, dance halls and brothels were roaring with business. Some half a hundred Kentuckians, with money in their pockets, had just landed from New Orleans, and were keen for a fight or a frolic. Hardy boatmen fought in single combat and in groups, for the sheer lust of battle. Women of all shades of complexion were shrewd onlookers. They easily deduced which men were bound upriver with fat earnings in their pockets.

To Bim the landing was a most welcome improvement over the flat as a place for drill. He lost no time in going through his military tactics. Groups formed and stared curiously, and then passed on for more drink.

Gray wandered aimlessly until he met Peevy. The latter lifted his brows and, with an almost imperceptible gesture of his head, directed attention to a bulletin board. On it were posted various bits of river information—about shifting bars, depths of various crossings and the like; but at the top of the board was a square of paper on which was neatly printed:

> Will Mr. Peevy and Mr. Gray and Mr. Cloud call on Mr. Rodrick in the Upper Town and learn something of great importance to each of them.

From the corner of his mouth Gray asked—

"Shall we go?"

"Not less we're fools," rumbled Peevy. "You stay lost. Big chief of this X.B.

business couldn't snag us on the river. Looks like this little trap was set to snag us ashore. His men did git poor Cloud an' give him a push into etarnity, but the writer of this notice can't know that yet."

CHAPTER V

THE MASQUERADE

A GREAT number of buzzards, scavengers of the lower and upper towns, whirled through the dusk to line the river bluffs and stare across at the swamps of Louisiana. Human vultures prowled along the waterfront, always bolder on the edge of night.

Peevy, closely followed by Bim and Gray, walked along at the rear of saloons, bawdy houses, gambling hells and lodging houses. He halted when he came to the America's Delight, favorably known for its excellent food and strong liquor. The Tennessee man's manner became more cautious. Whispering for his companions to keep back in the shadows, he advanced and tapped on the window of a small room.

Although the room was in darkness, the window was promptly raised. From the interior a voice whispered—

"Who is it with that signal?"

"The man you've been waitin' for, Cal."

"Of course, I spotted you out front and was wondering when you'd make me a call. The figures behind you? Friends, of course?"

"True friends. We're coming in." With that, Peevy slid over the sill and softly called for his companions to do likewise. Bim was reluctant to enter, but after Gray had handed in the musket he was quick to follow his property.

Closing the window and drawing the heavy curtain, the proprietor lighted a candle and placed it on the floor. The room served as office and bedchamber. Peevy informed his companions:

"This is George Calbert, one man down here you two can trust to the hilt. Cal, this is young Gray, of Gray and Gray, Pittsburgh traders. This is brother Bim, who fit an' bled in the Revolution. If the war had lasted longer he'd 'a' bled more. I 'low you can help me a trifle."

Calbert, whose face always wore a grim, determined expression as the result of his environment, whispered:

"Always keen to pay something on account, Peev. Never can pay the whole bill." To the others he explained, "I owe Peev everything—life and property. That takes in any friends he may fetch along. Name your trouble, Peev. Money?"

Peevy shook his head impatiently.

"You know better'n that, Cal. There's a writin' posted on a board out front. Asks me to call on Mr. Rodrick in the Upper Town. Who is he?"

"Never catch a glimpse of him, except when I go up with one of my men to deliver some wine. He wants the best, and pays high. He took over the old Colonel Kilter mansion a year or more ago. Big man. Must stand six-feet-four. With shoulders as wide as that door, almost. Never had any talk with him. Just walk up to his big desk, in what used to be the drawing room, and get my pay. Sometimes one of his niggers pays me at the door. Never saw him down here at the Landing. If he travels he must go horseback, or by carriage. He came down the Natchez Trace, bought the property, that's all. One of his niggers must have posted the writing."

"You oughter know more'n that about him."

"Don't. But Allen, of the Upper Town, must. He's one of your good friends. See him—or I'll go up and talk with him for you."

"Thanks, Cal. But the Peevys always was great hands to do their own talkin'. Reckon there should be some shavin' doin's. I'll use your kit an' spruce up a trifle." He made a lather

and stropped a razor. As he scraped his face he said, "Goin' up there. First written invite ever had. Usually asked to do things—with p'inted gun."

"It's bound to be a trap," expostulated Gray. "How does this man know you were coming here?"

"I'm master keen to l'arn that same thing. When a Peevy gits about so cur'ous, wild hosses can't hold him back. Mam an' pap onct got to argifyin' whether a neighbor livin' on t'other side Wild Hoss Mounting cut his meat with his left or right hand. Pap went over, some sixty miles. He was wrong."

"It's a death trap!" insisted Gray.

"No one up there will know me—with all these whisker doin's off," mumbled Peevy. "Already more'n one man on this landin' knows who I be with 'em on."

"They'll know you the minute you show your head."

"Won't, neither. Cal, there's a band of drunken Choctaws outside. Take a bottle of whisky. Trade it for one of their long feathered cloaks."

"Anything you say, Peev. Why the cloak?"

"Just a smart notion I got by seein' the reds. Some folks will be watchin' to see if I answer that writin'. I 'low to snuck up there as a noble, drunken Injun. Then they can't send word I'm comin'. Don't ever fret about a Peevy. Never got killed yet, have I?"

Calbert was skeptical of Peevy's suspicions. He said:

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Peev. Rodrick has nothing to do with this landing. If he wants to see you it's because some message from the traders up North has been left there for you. Rodrick spends his time drinking prime wine and reading books."

"Pap couldn't read till mam teached him. Pap held that only a sissy would spend time with a book. Wouldn't ever have one in the house, except the Bible."

"If you go, Bim and I will go with you," said Gray.

"With him to bust out with a drillin' fever just when we want it quiet. You 'n' Bim would be safer if you both was across on the flat. Some of the river scum is sure to git ugly with him. I'm boss of this outfit."

Calbert stared curiously at the vacant face of the eccentric.

"Is he deaf? You talk mighty plain about him."

"Not deef. Just shets out the world of today so's he can live back in the Revolution. Reckon he's got along to 'bout 1779. Can't tell what he'll do after he gits by the battle of Yorktown."

Then to Gray, and speaking incisively:

"Son, we-all have been watched from the minute we landed. Some folks here knew we was comin'. You 'n' Bim cross over to the flat an' wait for me there. I'll be follerin' you most any time."

"But what if you don't come?" anxiously asked Gray.

"Then you can reckon I've started on a mighty long journey. Always did have a hankerin' to look at the back side of the moon. If I don't show up by midday tomorrer, you 'n' Bim drop down N'Orleans an' hitch up with some fightin' boatmen who are makin' back home. But no Peevy ever was stopped yet . . . Make that cloak trade, Cal."

Calbert departed to find a thirsty Choctaw. Gray leaned forward and whispered:

"Who's at the head of this band of villains? Cassit?"

"No. Prob'ly boss along the Ohio. Feller who's hair I cut at the mouth of the Cumberland looked after the small doin's in that neighborhood. But them, an' a lot we ain't l'arned about yet, are just hired hands. All are workin' for a head devil, an' without knowin' just who he is. Brother Rodrick asks me to call, mebbe so I can l'arn how to die. I may be mistook. Your pap may know him an' may have sent some word down the Trace for him to give to us. But your pap never sent any word for

that John Cloud. Never heard of Cloud; an' I've got a mem'ry like a bee for the home hive. Take my rifle along with you. Bim's keen to git at his evenin' drillin'. Git along."

AFTER they had departed, Peevy's long, angular face became thoughtful. He was wishing young Gray safely back home. He went into a deep study of all the known facts he had learned about the widely spread activities of the criminal ring. The business had various faces: wholesale robbery, piracy, counterfeiting, with murder as the usual accompaniment.

The entrance of Calbert changed his line of thought, and a whimsical grin twisted his wide mouth as he said:

"Good work, Cal. You be a prime trader. Seem to have fetched ever'thing but his hide."

With a sniff of disgust Calbert dropped a long cloak of feathers on the floor, adding a head band of beads, a bow and arrows, a box of paint and a trade ax.

"There's your trash, Peev. But don't come near me after wearing it until you've washed seven times seven."

"Your firewater will clothe him like a big chief for the night. If he drinks all of it he'll never be hungry or need clothes ag'in."

Peevy removed some of his garments and painted his face in a startling design of red and black circles. After he had put on the head band and cloak Calbert exclaimed—

"Damme, if you don't look more like that drunken Choctaw than the man himself does!"

Peevy looked in the small mirror and grinned in appreciation of his masquerade. He wore his pistol in the back of his belt, and the knife and ax on either hip. Then he straddled the window sill and dropped lightly to the ground. Calbert stared into the night and listened for some sound of his friend's departure. He heard only the brawling of drunken men and the hard oaths of those who were fighting in the river style, with hands, teeth and feet. This hoarse clamor was punctuated by the shrill laughter of women.

In gaining the road to the upper town, Peevy passed through every stratum of Natchez society. Once above the landing he advanced on his errand more rapidly, the quiet of the Upper Town being in great contrast to the revelry below. The village, consisting of some four score houses, stood on a plain nearly a mile back from the bold bluffs, the latter hiding the river from view.

In the clear moonlight, and on the edge of the bluff, were the ruins of ancient Fort Rosalie, established by the French when John Law was conspicuously blowing his financial bubbles, which were to explode with disastrous repercussions along the Mississippi, and to cause the regency of the Duke of Orleans to be long remembered. Peevy stared at the ruins and almost wished he had sent his companions there to hide instead of across the river.

Taking the Washington road, and keeping to the outskirts of the village, Peevy finally rapped at the side door of a large house. An aged slave opened the door sufficiently for the candlelight to reveal the face of the caller. Peevy thrust a foot forward so the portal might not be closed. The slave exclaimed loudly. The master of the house appeared and demanded—

"What's all this noise about?"

"Injun man!" replied the slave.

The owner gave one glance at the hideous countenance and bruskly ordered—

"Get to perdition away from here!"

"I must look like the real article, Allen." Peevy chuckled.

The amazed householder was not yet ready to admit the uncouth caller; but he was interested.

"You know my name. You talk like a white man. Who is it who grins like a fool, as you are doing? And that big nose and long horse-face? Land of

grief! Hi, boy, get along! I'll attend to this."

After the servant departed, Allen removed the chain.

"The impossible Peevy," he said, laughing. "You tall, disreputable looking scoundrel! Sidle in here quick, before any of my blacks see you. What the devil you doing in that nasty smelling rig. What drunken prank is this?"

As he affectionately complained, he was securing the door and urging his visitor down the hall and into a room lined with books.

Peevy explained:

"This ain't no funny doin's, Allen. It's for blood. An' the game I'm huntin' smells worse than do these poor feathers. Fill a pipe for me."

"You look more like a drunken, dirty Indian than any Indian ever did. Of course, there's some idea behind that stinking mess of feathers."

"It has to be a big idee when I turn myself into a second hand bird of paradise. Allen, who an' why is Mr. Rodrick?"

Allen, deeply puzzled, wrinkled his scholarly brow and groped for an answer. He slowly replied:

"I don't know who, or what, he is. None of my friends ever saw him leave or enter his rambling old house. The first that we knew of him was after the house, long closed, was cleaned and put in thorough repair, and he was inside it. We know he is away at times, but none sees him go or return."

"You ain't overflowin' with newsy doin's, that's a fact," mused Peevy.

"I know something of his appearance. He's a big man, almost huge. His blacks won't, or can't, associate with any of our slaves. What's on your crazy mind? What mad prank are you up to?"

"I was just allowin' to pay Mr. Rodrick a evenin' call."

"You smell of everything but drink. The door will be opened on the chain for about an inch, my eccentric friend, and you'll be told to go away. That is, if the big dog outside doesn't kill you, or chase you away, before you can sound the knocker."

"Some big pup doin's, eh, Allen? I'll bet my half of the *Western Star* agin your left eye that I won't even be warned off. Bet you t'other half agin your right eye that there's goin' to be some rare neighborly doin's."

"Old friend, you stop before you begin. And why this outrageous disguise, if you are crazy enough to call there?"

"I'm callin' because I was asked. If I try to neighbor as Ramblin' Peevy, I might run into a big bust of trouble. Down on the rivermen's board, right above the warnin' about fresh snags in the channel at the foot of Island 113, is a perlite piece of writin' askin' Mr. Peevy to call on Mr. Rodrick an' l'arn something mighty 'portant. Thought it might be some sort of a trap, an' 'lowed to git inside without springin' it. But I reckon no risk is as bad as the smell of these feathers."

"But how could a man you never heard of know you were coming here? And how could he have any information that might interest you?"

Peevy grinned widely and answered:

"That's the nub of the whole business. It's crazier than even my Aunt Ella was, an' she was so crazy she 'lowed if she could freeze buttercups they'd turn to gold. But Rodrick knew I was comin'. Knew when I pulled in. That cuss seems to know more about my doin's than I do myself. But I never stick my head into a holler log if I opine a sarpent or a skunk is in there. What I preponderate to do is to sort of sidle into that house, an' be face to face with him afore he knows I've come, or who I be. If he knew I was comin', he might git fussed up an' reckon he'd have to bake me a cake."

"But he must know you, if he knows you're here. Your talk sounds foolish. Listen, you tall, rambling, indecent person. Can't you see I'm dying of curiosity?"

"In a sort of a way, I ain't funnin',

Allen. You must have heard of lawless critters hangin' out near the landin'."

"As long as I can remember, there's been talk about human refuse living in the Louisiana swamps. There's some twenty thousand square miles of alluvial and swamp lands over there. Big enough for an empire. It's commonly believed that a band of such creatures have a place over there now. One of the men in the Lower Town made a drunken wager he could prove it. He crossed over. Within forty-eight hours he was found, drifting in his boat, down the river, his throat cut."

"Of course he would be found that way, if he didn't know the sort of a game he was headin' into. Allen, you're one of few men I can tell things to. I want to find out if this Rodrick is yoked up to the scoundrels who be murderin' boatmen an' stealin' flats loaded with trade goods."

"And knowing that you will walk into what may be a death trap?"

"Edge in," gravely corrected Peevy. "My tribe never surrenders, much. Know of anybody I can send in my place? 'Course you don't. You must know the inside of that house as you know your right hand."

"I could go anywhere in it, blindfolded. Mighty big loss when the old colonel died, leaving no one to live there."

"Draw me a map of the ground floor."

"And help you to commit suicide." Allen sighed. "Yet you'll go, map or no map. You're a thoroughly irresponsible and impossible person."

Allen took a quill and worked rapidly. Peevy, looking over his shoulder, asked—

"What's that wart on the side of the ell?"

"Shed for garden tools." Allen added two marks and explained, "An outside entrance to the root cellar."

"Barred, of course. Wood or iron?"

"Wooden bar in the old colonel's time. These stairs lead up to the pantry off the cook room. Then comes the serving pantry, then the long dining room. Two drawing rooms at the front. The hall extends through the house, of course . . . I wish you hadn't come here and asked me to do this. I'm helping you to come to some sad hurt. The blacks are scared almost white if questioned about their master."

"Blacks are notional. What's your idee of how he quits and enters the house?"

"He has the old colonel's big carriage, and good horses. So he must use them. He must travel up the Washington road and into the Natchez Trace. I've seen him through the window as he works at a huge desk in the front room. Tall, very muscular."

"Thankee, Allen. I'll pow-wow with myself an' do a bit of scoutin'. Let me scamper out the side door. Don't fetch no light."

"I'd as quickly face a tiger as Rodrick's black beast."

"I'd rather have 'em big than little an' yappin'. I have a way with dawgs. Goodby. Sometime we'll have a snort of your prime liquor doin's."

ALLEN unwillingly led the way through a dark hall to a rear door. Peevy's exit was as noiseless as the passing of a shadow. Proceeding down the street, he turned and made direct for the rear of the old mansion. He suddenly was conscious of something sloe-black, moving parallel with his course. Once he stepped out of the beaten path, a low, ominous growl warned him not to trespass. Peevy halted and squatted on his heels, sticking his long knife into the ground beside him. Then in a soft, wheedling voice he talked to the great dog. He told the huge creature what a fine fellow he was. He chirruped to him in a scarcely audible, syrupy voice. The growling continued, but as the huge brute slowly advanced there seemed to be an explanatory note in the warning.

Peevy, motionless, continued his wiles.

At last the dog stood close by, sniffing at the cloak. He threatened to become ferocious as long fingers gently scratched behind his ears. He growled, but more softly. When Peevy slowly withdrew his hand the big head crowded against his knees.

He had overcome the first defense of the mysterious recluse. With his hand in the scruff of the brute's neck, he slowly walked along until he could look into the large drawing room.

Rodrick sat with his back to the wall and was completely fenced in by a high desk. This piece of furniture was in the unusual shape of a half circle and extended from wall to wall. It suggested a defense, a breastwork. Peevy was convinced that did the man drop behind it he would be safe from any bullet. The Tennesseean had never seen a more magnificent physical specimen than the man at the desk.

Rodrick was busy with a sheaf of papers. On some he wrote rapidly. Others were fed to one of the tall candles. No servants were visible. Having exhausted the possibilities for spying from that particular point, Peevy led the dog to the door of the root cellar. The brute whined, then growled a question when the amiable intruder used a long knife in shaving slivers from the edge of the door. Peevy was compelled to pause and pat the huge head and whisper assurances that all was as it should be. The dog was but half convinced. By alternately petting and working, however, the Tennessee man finally was able to insert the blade under the bar and lift it from its socket. Then with a parting rough caress he quickly stepped inside and closed the door, lowering the bar. The dog, disapproving of such abrupt leave taking, bayed a bit.

With Allen's floor plan memorized, the Southerner carefully groped his way to the stairs. His moccasined feet made no sound, and soon he was in the pantry, off the cook room. He opened the door a crack and listened with all his border acuteness. The cook room was empty, and he entered it and opened a door giving into the long hall. Now the sound of a voice was audible. The master was asking questions. Then followed the soft voice of an African, giving some information about household affairs. Peevy's position invited detection. The big stairway interested him. By descending it, he would be at the archway of the drawing room, and in the presence of his unsuspecting host before the latter could realize he was in the house.

He investigated the nearest door in the hall and found that it opened on the back stairway. Without any hesitation he closed the door behind him and rapidly gained the second floor. A candle was burning halfway down the hall. Peevy, now a ghost in stealth, sped along to the head of the stairway. Lying flat and craning his neck, he saw a huge colored man enter the hall from the drawing room, carrying glasses and a decanter on a silver tray. Peevy knew some one had entered the house since he spied through the window. The newcomer evidently had been expected and had been admitted. The slave had taken away two glasses.

A gruff voice now sounded, saying—

"Until that's settled, I'll say good night."

The deep, musical voice of Rodrick replied:

"It must be ended. I have full report. The man is no common sneaking spy."

A roughly dressed man, hat in hand, backed into the hall and assured his master:

"Whether he comes here or not, he'll quit his snoopin' before morning. That also means the younker with him."

"No! How many times must I warn you fools to do as I say, and nothing more? The young man will be dealt with in good time. You do your one job, and you've obeyed orders. Over, or under, in the least degree, and you've disobeyed."

"Gawd! I ain't looking for extry

work. I'll do just as I'm told."

"That's the right spirit. I know I can trust you not to fail. The black will show you out the back door."

Hands clapped smartly. A negro noiselessly came along the hall to the archway. Rodrick ordered:

"Show this man out the back door. I am expecting another guest."

The slave bowed low and then led the visitor down the hall. Peevy secured a glimpse of the man who was eager to do more than was ordered. His hair was curiously roached. He stood revealed as the brawler whom Peevy had all but scalped in the tavern at the mouth of the Cumberland.

Although successful thus far in what had appeared to be a most desperate venture, Peevy was disappointed. The big man below, by his talk, had satisfied the investigator he was not the chief of the pirate band.

With stealth which would have reflected credit on the original owner of the cloak, Peevy began his descent of the stairs, moving backward on all fours. On reaching the lower hall, his interest mounted sharply. Again he could see the massively built man. He heard steps coming along the hall. He crouched low and pulled his pistol. It was one of the slaves. He halted half way up the hall and called out:

"Ol' Nero, he act mighty queer, marse. He wanter come in."

"Throw him out a bone, fool! Bother me again and I'll throw you out and tell him you're the bone."

The slave hurriedly retreated to the cook room, and Peevy, as noiseless as a shadow, advanced through the archway. His unwitting host was bowing low over a paper and was scanning it with scowling brows. It was the steady force of the intruder's gaze that caused the man to fidget a bit and then jerk up his head.

Blank amazement filled the dark eyes, as what purported to be a Choctaw drew nearer to the desk. Then the deep voice demanded:

"Who in the name of the foul fiend are you, redskin? How did you get in?"

"I'm the man you advertised for in the Lower Town, Mr. Rodrick. Name of Peevy—the Tennessee Peevys."

As he spoke the Southerner swept back his cloak and hooked his thumbs in his belt.

CHAPTER VI

HOT TRAILING

FOR a count of five the two men stared at each other. Amazement and anger were reflected in Rodrick's voice as he demanded—

"How did you get into this house?"

"Walked in. You asked me to come, didn't you?"

"But how, and why in that filthy disguise?"

"Patted the pup on the head and come in . . . So I wouldn't be follered."

"And your name is—"

"John Cloud."

"That's a lie. Cloud was recently killed by red savages up the river."

"I tried you on Peevy, but it didn't seem to suit. So I shifted to Cloud."

"So? I accept you as Peevy. But these are dangerous times. I don't like your sly way of entering, your disguise. You knew about Cloud's death. Maybe he was killed by a white Indian," said Rodrick.

Peevy grinned through his grotesque mask of paint and replied—

"Cloud was dead when I see him floating down the river."

"Let's get back to *you*. I want to know how you entered this house unknown to me, or my servants."

"But you asked me to call," patiently replied the Southerner. "Bein' common doin's in the human fambly, I snucked in the back way."

"I was told that you were clever; but it requires no cleverness to sneak into a man's house."

"Yes, it does, too," stubbornly ob-

jected Peevy. "You wanted me to walk up to the front door—don't touch that pistol! You're covered by a rifle through the winder."

Instinctively Rodrick shifted his gaze for an instant; long enough for the Tennessee man to seize a heavy chair and hold it as a shield while he drew his own pistol.

By a mighty effort Rodrick held his rage in leash. He endeavored to make his voice sound casual, even cordial, as he said:

"There's no call for you to act this way. I thought you were one of those thieving Indians. As Peevy, you are welcome. My invitation was a friendly one. But your stealthy entrance—your knowledge of poor Cloud's death—and in such a devilish rig . . . Where's young Gray?"

"On his way to N'Orleans. Didn't know you knew him. You remind me of somebody I've seen not far back. What you hone to tell me? You sent for me. I'm here."

The man's high forehead was damp with sweat; but his voice was even as he replied—

"Because you are in danger."

"Good lands! Is that all? When I ain't in danger I feel lonesome. Just like nobody loved me."

Rodrick opened his mouth as if to reply, but with a sudden puff blew out the candle, almost in the same moment firing a pistol and ducking below the desk. Reacting mechanically, Peevy fired, the two reports sounding almost as one. The room now was in semi-darkness, with only a faint light from the hall revealing the entrance. The big desk began to roll forward. A slave yelled at the back of the house.

"Keep out, Bamboo!" roared Rodrick.

Peevy yelled in amazement as he beheld a short, squat figure come from behind the desk. He retreated, to decoy what suddenly had become a dwarf into the light of the hall candle. He was vastly ashamed, as well as astounded, to realize how he had been deceived. A man more than six feet tall was suddenly become a gnome-like creature with the width of his powerful shoulders nearly equaling his height. With another long, backward step the Southerner was all but in the hall, the light coming over his shoulder. Now he could see Rodrick plainly, and was nonplused to discover he was the hunchback pedler, the Biggets Town murderer, who had found refuge on the flat. Only now there was no sign of a hump.

"The bloody murderer the posse chased!" gasped Peevy. There almost was admiration in his voice.

"Yes and yes!" roared Rodrick. "And your pistol is empty. No mortal man can best me hand to hand, knife to knife."

"Neighbor, you're goin' to wake up in hell a well eddicated man on that very same point," mumbled Peevy. "When it comes to knife doin's, my tribe don't surrender, much."

Yet he had a great respect for his foe's long, muscle corded arms. The dwarf extended his knife hand ahead of him, and the arm behind it suggested the rigidity and strength of an iron bar.

Peevy grasped the Choctaw's trade hatchet as well as the knife. He suddenly gestured as if to hurl the ax. The knife hand of the dwarf snapped back. Instinctively the Tennessee man twisted sidewise and felt the blade pierce his flapping cloak and graze the flesh. Peevy's cast was an instant slower. With a smothered scream the dwarf tore at his throat and gave ground, falling to the floor before the half circular desk, with his opponent's blade protruding from the side of his neck.

There came a bellow of mighty rage down the hall, and Peevy whirled to meet the attack of one of the blacks, who was armed with a long butcher knife. He hurled the Choctaw ax. The handle smacked against the African's skull. The fellow stumbled on. Peevy leaped into the drawing room and re-

covered his knife. But the slave, once he had glimpsed the sprawling figure of his grotesque master, turned and raced to the rear of the building.

PEEVY secured the candle from the hall and reloaded his pistol, then proceeded to go behind the desk and set about examining the papers. It was obvious that Rodrick, among other duties, was the bookkeeper of the criminal ring. The dwarf had been perusing a letter, apparently, when interrupted by Peevy's unexpected arrival. It was printed with rare precision, and stated:

> Watch for a tall man named Peevy and a young man named Gray. They must be stopped. —THE GENERAL

The next item to catch Peevy's attention was a memorandum in the dwarf's handwriting, which read: "Stop George Calbert."

Peevy softly exclaimed:

"Good land! George Calbert's listed along of bein' my friend! Pedler must 'a' done some rare spyin' in the Lower Town. Wonder what he did with his hump!"

He opened several drawers and in a lower one he found a big pad of leather fitted with shoulder straps, and was convinced that this explained the dead man's disguise when abroad.

Peevy again examined the printed command, and mumbled:

"General, eh? I'll 'general' him!"

There was nothing to indicate when, or where, the order had been written. The investigator was disappointed.

"Reckoned this was the center of the web, and it's only the edge," he grumbled.

He emptied another drawer and rapidly examined the papers, some of which he stuffed into the bosom of his shirt. They appeared to be reports of the ring's various felonious coups. Almost all were so cunningly phrased as to appear to be memoranda of legitimate business transactions. But Peevy's knowledge of various lost cargoes permitted him to read the truth between the lines. He found John Cloud's name, with the three words, "To be stopped". This was in printed characters. The dwarf had recently appended to it the one word: "Stopped".

Peevy seized a quill and in sprawling characters wrote across a sheet of paper, "Dwarf called Rodrick has been stopped." He dated this and appended the order, "To be sent to the general." He signed it and decided to call it an evening. If he had failed to learn the great secret, the name of the spider in the center of the web, he at least had satisfied himself that agents of the band had kept tabs on him and his young companion throughout all their journeyings, and that news of their coming had preceded their arrival. For a few moments this knowledge caused him to feel weak and helpless. His fears were not for himself, but for young Gray.

Replacing the papers in the desk, he went to the front door and whistled. The beast, on guard, leaped in and raced to the drawing room to find his master. Peevy stepped out and closed the door, and ran rapidly to the house of his friend.

His talk with Allen was hurried, the latter having small opportunity to interrupt. After a rapid recital of what had taken place, Peevy directed:

"Go there with some of your neighbors. Warn the slaves, if they ain't vamoosed, to chain the dawg. You may have to shoot him if he's with his master. Clear out the desk. Send all the papers you find up the Trace by a trusty messenger to Gray an' Gray, Pittsburgh. Write a few lines, sayin' I'm mortal busy playin' peek-a-boo with the devil, but will report later. You oughter find two thousand dollars in gold somewhere in the house, stole from some one in Biggets Town. Send word up there that the murderer is dead an' the gold is waitin' to be claimed."

As Peevy paused to get his breath, Allen exclaimed:

"To think we never guessed the truth! Had a high chair to make him look tall. And a high desk that hid him from the waist down. That's why we never saw him go or come. Entered his carriage in the carriage house—"

"Back water! I ain't got time to neighbor. Must find old Bim and young Gray. Don't doubt but what at night Rodrick visited the Lower Town as a hunchback."

"Hark! What's that?" nervously interrupted Allen.

Peevy ran to the door and opened it. It was the death howl of the huge dog.

"Ding bust!" exclaimed the Southerner. "I'm goin' back there an' give that poor cuss a chance to trail along with me an' be honest."

"You're crazy! I warn you—"

But Peevy was away, running fleetly to the Rodrick house. He found the front door as he had left it. He threw it open and called to the dog. Like a thunderbolt the huge creature was upon him, snatching at his throat. Peevy caught him by neck and throat and swung him off the stone steps and commenced talking. As he talked he gradually released his grip. The dog made a deep rumbling sound, half threat, half inquiry. He now recognized the intruder. The Tennessee man shifted his grip to the scruff of the neck.

"Just givin' you a chance to lead a Christun, upright life. But there's no compellin' 'bout it. You have free ch'ice. Goin' along with me, or stay here 'n' be shot?"

He released the brute, closed the door and started for the path leading down to the Lower Town. He had proceeded several rods before the dog came to a decision. He heard the rush of the huge animal, and felt a strong urge to wheel about to guard against a very probable attack. He kept his face to the front. The beast was close behind him. Peevy felt he was being stalked. Then the dog crowded against his legs and welcomed the hand patting his big head.

" 'Tween me 'n' the moon, you're my dawg from now on to forever more," Peevy murmured.

Man and beast reached the rear of the America's Delight without passing in front of the line of dives. The soft tap on the window of the darkened sleeping room was almost instantly answered. The sash was raised a trifle and a low voice demanded—

"Who is it?"

"Chief Muck-a-Muck an' his new puppy dawg. Open up."

In a few moments the rear door was unbarred and opened. But when Calbert had lighted a candle in his room he displayed alarm on beholding the black beast at Peevy's heels. Before he could speak, the Southerner said:

"You 'tend to your own knittin' an' the pup will 'tend to his. Gimme my rifle."

"Take it. But I'll be hacked, mangled, gagged and strangled if I like the company you've fetched along. And don't think you're going to leave any of those Indian duds here, or near here. This is an eating house. What's happened?"

"Rodrick has passed away. 'Tendin' fires by now, most likely. Head of the pirate doin's is known as the General. Rodrick was only a captain. Your name was writ in his big book as one who was to be 'stopped'. Poetry for bein' kilt. Rodrick's been stopped for all time, an' a good joke on him. Here's how it turned out."

For several minutes Peevy talked fast and concisely, painting the tragedy of the old mansion in broad strokes. When he had finished, Calbert understood all that had happened in the Upper Town. What made the deepest impression on the eating house proprietor was the methodical manner in which the terrible business was conducted. He softly exclaimed:

"Good Lord! They keep ledger accounts! What next?"

"I'm crossin' tonight to find young Gray an' old Bim."

"You've done me a good turn by your work tonight, Peev. So I was to be rubbed out, eh? Wait a minute."

After a hurried visit to the cook room, he returned with a large package of cooked food, including meat and a bone for the dog. Peevy waited until the beast had bolted the meat, then dropped the bone for him to carry. As he turned to go, Calbert clutched his arm and whispered—

"If you're not back here in twenty-four hours, I'll send some of the wild boatmen across to look you up."

"I'll be back. Just goin' to fetch young Gray. Now that he's marked to be stopped, I want him close by me. I've got all sorts of proof in them papers that Allen will send North, except one big fact. Who's the general? Once I can nail him, there'll be acres of silences so far as piratin' is concerned down here an' along the Ohio."

WITH this vow duly registered, he was off, the dog contentedly trotting at his heels and carrying the big bone. The night's revelry was at its height. Drunken men staggered about, fighting and singing. Several spied Peevy and accepted him as fair game, because of his cloak and head band of feathers, but reconsidered on encountering the fierce gaze of the dog. On guard against drunken assault, Peevy quickly pressed his search for a light boat, and came to a skiff which suited his needs.

Entering the boat, closely followed by the dog, Peevy set his course somewhat above where he believed his friends had entered the quiet waters of the swamp. The dog gnawed the bone and grumbled contentedly. Peevy planned his course by aid of the lights under the hill, and worked hard against the current until beyond midstream, and then came about on a long, downstream slant. He was practically abreast of the town when he escaped the last tug of the river and glided into dead water.

The dog began whining, and there was something pitiable in this new note. Peevy took time to fondle the big head.

The prow of the boat was following a ripple of light laid down by a western star. Peevy arranged his thoughts in orderly sequence and shrewdly examined every discernible angle of the problem ahead. Cassit and Rodrick were eliminated. The piratical organization knew it was being hunted and was eager to strike back. At that very moment the Southerner believed that the brains behind the bloody business were functioning more actively and vindictively than ever. From the first stage of young Gray's quest, he and the Tennesseean had been pursued. This foreknowledge doubtless had reached New Orleans.

"Pup, you understand," murmured Peevy. "I'm like a man with a lighted candle, a-huntin' varmints hid in a dark room. They see me afore I can take a squint at 'em. Dead center, pup! The Peevy tribe must work faster."

Peevy was a quarter of a mile in the dead water when he discovered a ruddy light blooming in the heart of the black water—the reflected glare of a campfire. He had come almost direct to where the flat was moored close by a five-foot mound. A voice called over the stagnant flood—

"Who are you?"

Peevy's drawling voice called back—

"Just myself."

"Peevy!" softly cried the delighted voice of young Gray.

"Be you where you sound to be, or somewhere else?"

"Here by the fire."

Dried stems of dead swamp plants were added to the coals, and the resulting flare revealed the two men. Bim was lying down, presumably asleep. With a swirl of the paddle Peevy sent the light craft through the water grasses to nose into the slight elevation. Dropping the paddle and seizing the dog by the neck, he cautioned:

"Stay just as you be. I'm fetchin' a

dawg along what's lost his master. Kind and chuck full of Christun feelin's by natur'; but he might chaw your hind leg off if he don't understand you're my friend. How's the battle of Saratoga behavin'?"

"Asleep since sundown. Sort of lonesome place. I have the rope. Come ashore."

Peevy tossed the package of food ashore, seized the dog by the scruff of the neck and stepped knee deep into the water. Gray thrust forth a hand. The beast growled ominously. Peevy slapped his jaws. Gray tugged an ear gently. Then the two squatted on the knoll and talked in whispers. Soon the dog was crowding between them. Peevy related his experiences. Presently they slept, the big dog between them.

Bim was the first to awaken, if the dog be excepted. He was going through his manual when Peevy awoke.

After a breakfast of bacon and bread had been eaten, Gray modestly announced:

"Made a discovery at sunset last night. Kept it till now to save you exploring in the darkness. It was after I'd found a spring of clean water. Climbed a tree and looked down on what seemed to be a big pond, or lake, to the west. I saw a fleet of flats floating there. Appeared to be moored together. If the light had held, I'd have taken Bim and investigated."

Peevy, forthwith, gained the low ridge and swarmed up a live oak. When he descended he said:

"Some of the missin' flats. But they never floated over that mud ridge. They was taken due west a quarter of a mile to where the ridge ends, then south into the lake. Plenty of water under all that grass. We'll look 'em over. If their cargoes ain't been moved, we'll fetch boatmen an' take 'em down to N'Orleans, an' sell 'em to the accounts of the owners for what they'll fetch. Mebbe the general hangs out in N'Orleans."

Gray was very juvenile in his zest to explore. Peevy ruled that Bim should remain in the camp. He tried to leave the dog, but the brute nearly upset the skiff by suddenly leaping aboard.

At times the skiff was forced through tall, thick grasses, with the insect life a misery. At other intervals the voyagers glided across dark areas, where the scattered, semi-tropical growth was alive with finches, orioles, cedar birds and that most delightful of singers, the mocking bird. In loftier flight were countless herons, eagles, hawks and gulls. The air seemed to be choked with feathered folk. The antithesis of all this melodious grace and beauty was found by a deflection of the gaze. Lizards, huge turtles, snakes and other abhorrent forms of life caused Gray to wish he was in a stouter craft.

Shortly the skiff entered an area which was carpeted with water lily plants. Beyond was a broad lane, leading to a larger body of water. Desire and open faring permitted the two to make excellent progress. They came up to the fleet in time to observe a brown bear striving to open a hatchway. The dog nearly upset the skiff as he leaped on to the flat and floundered ashore after the bear. Peevy secured the skiff and boarded the flat and, after a sweeping glance, announced:

"All these were fetched here this Spring. Now to see what this one holds."

He soon had the hatch open.

"Pittsburgh glass bottles, empty. Waste of space not to ship 'em full of Monongahela rye. Prob'ly to be reshipped to the Caribbees. Lots of smoked hams forward. Here's a paper doin's, givin' the ladin'. Sent by a Philadelphy Quaker."

With the zeal of an explorer, Gray passed to the next boat. This was much larger than the first. He reported:

"Big cargo of tools. Here's the invoice. One of Colonel Pointer's boats."

For two hours they investigated the

flats, and came upon two cargoes of dress goods and notions sent down by Gray and Gray. The various landings included corn, hams, dried pork, coarse linens, flour, lime, tools, cotton goods, and much whisky and rum. Peevy made a list of the boats and cargoes, and the owners, when the last fact could be ascertained. As they started to return to the camp he announced:

"Biggest haul I ever made in all the work I've done for traders. Then think of the stuff pirated on this an' many other rivers, what is never recovered. The scuts plan to run these flats down to N'Orleans in one big fleet. Just waitin' till the big spider in the middle of the web gives the word."

"What's your plan?"

"Cross to Natchez Landin'. Git a parcel of boatmen, home bound, who have spent their wages on sky hootin' rum doin's an' women. They'd take these flats to hell if paid in hard money."

CHAPTER VII

PEEVY HIRES A HAND

As the skiff emerged from the inundated region and swiftly made for the eastern shore in a long diagonal across the current, Gray remarked—

"Never have I seen the moon light up like that!"

Peevy twisted his head and swept his gaze over the star dusted heavens.

"Judas John Jones! Moon? That's a fire! Mighty big doin's."

"Lower Town's burning!" cried Gray.

"No, no! Upper Town. Too bad."

They redoubled their efforts and, as they rapidly neared the south end of the long cove, the bluffs hid the burning building. The rosy light illuminated the upper section of the road and aroused countless buzzards into flight. Denizens of the landing were hurrying to the Upper Town, and the indistinct clamor of their voices was like the tongues of Babel. None had eyes for the three men and the big dog leaving the skiff.

Peevy led the way to Calbert's eating house and found it practically deserted. Bim seated himself against the wall, his musket between his knees, and appropriated two huge slices of bread, between which was a slab of roast beef —abandoned by some diner—and commenced eating. Hurrying to the cook room, Gray and Peevy found the help staring through the windows at the painted heavens. Calbert was at a small table, finishing his day's bookkeeping. On beholding Peevy he arose and, without a word, led the way to his room. Closing the door and window, he announced—

"Rodrick's big house has gone up in smoke."

"Set, of course," said Peevy.

"Doubtless burned to cover up something."

"If the slaves ran away, which they probably did, after their master's death, no one was left to start a blaze," said Gray.

"There was the man who left the house while I was hidin' on the stairs," said Peevy. "But I do hope most mortal that Allen got around to pick up the books and paper doin's. I'll have to snuk up there an' l'arn if the papers was saved."

"I'm dying to know what you found across the river," said Calbert, without removing his gaze from the window.

Peevy gave a terse recital of all that he and Gray had discovered.

"Now that account is closed, Cal, I want you to do something for me in the river trade."

"No more Indian feathers! I swear I won't handle any such smelly—"

"What I'm askin' is as pure as a Methody Sunday school," interrupted Peevy. "We opine to float them boats down to N'Orleans. That means we'll need a stout crew. Not only prime boatmen, but also humdingers in a ring. Cal, you must know who's the fightenest boatmen at this landin'."

Calbert nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"There's quite a number of Kentucky boys here, who have worn their welcome threadbare. Haven't any money. Threw it all away, like fools. When they sober up for the last time they'll hate to work their passage back home, with nothing in their jeans to show for their time and labor. Scarcely one has the price of a decent meal of vittles left. Caroused it all away."

"I want rare hellions for this job."

"Don't fret. They'll spit in the face of the devil and run rings around him. I'll catch them in the morning."

"Cal, you talk as a will made out in my favor oughter read. Herd 'em before me in the mornin'." Then to Gray, "Son, turn in and sleep. Cal can find you a bed. I'll leave the puppy dawg with you."

Gray wanted to go to the Upper Town, but Peevy could be very insistent. He discarded his Indian trappings, cradled his long rifle in his arm and hastened to the Upper Town. A light burned in Allen's study; and Peevy's peculiar rap on the window promptly brought the householder to the side entrance.

"You back again with that accursed—"

"Larboard oars backwater!"

Peevy brushed by him and led the way to the study. He drew the heavy curtain close and whispered—

"Did you get the books?"

"Two account books and some loose papers. They should make a stir up North in more than one counting room. They give no clue as to the leader of the band. One appears to be a stock book, as if the pirates kept a strict account of all they stole, or made."

"Made? Never would make what they could steal."

"But various sums of money are listed, as if it were merchandise. Such as gold in five-dollar pieces. Also Spanish and Portuguese doubloons. All such must be counterfeits; also their Spanish pieces of eight."

"I'll take the books to the lower landin' an' look them over. I'll send them back to you in the mornin', along with five stout Kentuckians. I still want you to deliver the books to Gray, Pittsburgh, and tell him all you know. You drop over to Dr. Deshon's place an', sort of careless-like, stay there all night."

"I won't show myself to be a coward."

"Nor you don't want to wake up playin' a harp of seventeen strings. I plan to see your back passin' through Deshon's side door."

"Old friend, I insist you call in the Government officers."

"By the time I could make 'em understand, every one would be dead. Ag'in, no Peevy ever was scared off a trail yet. Had a grandpap who 'lowed he could swim the Ohio in a big fresh. Batteaux men hauled him out the icy water in midstream. His langwidge made the river boil. They set him ashore, but he went right back to where he 'lowed he'd been picked up an' hopped right back in ag'in."

"And finished what he set out to do," added Allen.

"Never knew for sartain. Never seen to land on the north shore."

"Have your stubborn way." Allen sighed. "I only hope it won't lead to your disappearance. You wouldn't be you if you ever took decent precautions."

"Who would I be? You can't answer. You're licked. Fetch the books."

ALLEN produced the books and papers, and Peevy tucked them under his arm and walked with his friend to the Deshon mansion. Then he hastened back to Calbert's place, where, without bothering to undress, he slept like one in a stupor until five o'clock in the morning. Clapping on his hat and pulling on his moccasins, he found Calbert talking with five battle scarred rivermen. They were wolfing their breakfast. Calbert explained:

"These beauties know what you want.

They'll do it unless every man-jack gets killed. They know they are to protect Allen and see that he delivers that package and returns home in safety."

Peevy wrote rapidly on a sheet of paper and gave it to the ugliest of the five.

"That writin', plus Allen's talk, will be worth a season's wages to each of you once you reach Gray and Gray's counting-room. Mr. Allen will buy some good horses. Now run away from yourselves."

They bolted the remainder of their food and picked up rifles, knives and pistols from a corner, and the leader placed the package inside a waterproof wrapping and set forth.

"Lordy! But that's a big load off my shoulders," said Peevy.

Calbert produced a folded paper and handed it to Peevy. The latter opened it and read aloud:

> "Lucky we thought of it. House ransacked during the night. Nothing taken. Shall not return until I know the murdering prowlers are caught, or killed.

"One of Deshon's niggers fetched this in half an hour ago. He was so scared he looked almost white."

Peevy nodded and entered the dining-room. The help was serving those who had been carousing all night, and those who were beginning a new day. Peevy went outside and sat down by the door. Calbert soon followed him and called out to a tall, lanky man, whose heavy features wore a morose expression:

"Fetch out your wildcats, Willis. Fine job. Easy money."

The dour face became slightly animated. The man threw back his head and emitted a scream that would have filled any tree cat with envy. Obviously it was a call to arms—a signal for the Kentucky bred to face a major peril. Men emerged from behind shacks, where they had slept on the ground; from barrooms which never closed, day or night, and from flatboats moored along the landing. All were disheveled, unwashed and thoroughly unlovely. But the very truculence of their bearing caused Peevy's eyes to twinkle. Willis, the boatmen's leader, had been informed by Calbert of Peevy's need. He began:

"Men of old Kentuck', this rangy critter by the name of Peevy 'lows he has some good payin' work for us. I'd never believe it from his looks; but when Calbert says a thing is so, that's enough for us. This Peevy looks to me like a tremenjous old liar. An' if he's fooled me, then he's fooled Calbert, an' is bound to sup on sorrer."

"Speakin' of suppin'," broke in Peevy, "how many of you ornery, low-down looking whelps happen to be hungry?" The mob lowered savagely; but none would admit hunger, although almost every belt was at the last notch. Peevy understood. He continued, "I never go for to hire hungry men, as their hearts can't be in their work. I had in mind some hawg jowls doin's, fat country sassige an' plenty of tasty bacon an' hot corn bread an'—"

"Stop, damn ye, or I'll bash yer head in!" cried one man.

Ignoring the interruption, Peevy continued:

"Breakfas' is ready. You have half a hour to eat. You will be guests of my boss, up-country. Afterward, them who ain't easy skeered will hear me talk turkey. Head in to Calbert's. No lack of victuals."

A seventeen-year-old boy was the first to weaken. He loudly asked Calbert—

"Is that old whelp good for the fodder?"

"Perfectly good even if he wants to feed a thousand men," Calbert replied.

There were a few moments of tense rigidity, pride fighting against empty stomachs. Then a middle-aged man surrendered,

"I'll eat, even if the devil hisself pays the shot."

His example, as he madly rushed

through the doorway, was contagious. Willis was the last to enter. He scowled fiercely at Peevy in passing.

At the end of the thirty minutes the men came forth, picking their teeth with their belt knives, and gathered in groups to hear the Southerner's proposition. Peevy asked Willis—

"These critters easy to scare?"

"They be wildcats. Ain't afraid of man or devil. They are too tough to die. They'll put through any job they agree to tackle."

"I'm reckonin' they would," said Peevy. Then, as if seeing Willis for the first time, he called out to Calbert, asking, "Who's this tall cuss who seems to be Kentucky's leadin' citizen down here?"

Calbert frowned a warning, and he answered—

"He's best known hereabouts as Hell-bent Willis."

"Oh, he is, is he?" rumbled Peevy, as he swung about and stared at the lowering Kentuckian. "See here, Willis, I never hire a man who reckons he's a better man in a wring than I be."

"Then I've lost a chance to earn some hard money. I 'lowed there was some catch to it," growled Willis.

"I reckoned you was the uppish kind an' would think that way. What say if you an' me have a neighborly little wring?"

Kentuckians and others were on the *qui vive*. Here was the spice of life. It was an era when great odds had to be faced and overcome; when great risks must be accepted. No refinements of society as yet had ousted the rough-and-tumble fighting type. It was the raw age along the border, and the insincere punctilios of the formal duel had not yet arrived. Men fought each other as beasts fight, scorning no advantage. It was nature's way of refining a raw country. Only the physically fit, with the lust of battle in their hearts, could reduce the lawless border to those prosaic and livable conditions so necessary for the growth of homes.

THE challenge automatically eliminated from the Kentuckian's mind all thought of the much needed wages, of the source of his next meal, of everything except the outstanding fact that a Kentucky man was about to put a Tennessee man on his proper level. Willis was quick to say:

"I'm game, if that panther can be hitched. I don't hanker to fight the two of you at the same time." Then, as if afraid of missing a glorious opportunity, he added, "But if you 'low you need the critter's help, I'll take the two of you."

Peevy directed Gray to take the dog to the bedroom and lock him in. Gray was greatly perturbed by the unexpected and, as he believed, entirely unnecessary turn the adventure had taken. He was convinced that no stout Kentucky man would float the lost cargoes down to New Orleans. Yet he did as bidden without a word.

The Kentuckian, now highly pleased with the work before him, stripped off his heavy shirt and revealed a barrel of a chest, disfigured by old scars inflicted by knives, bullets and human talons. He gently asked—

"Flatboat way, of course?"

"I propogate it's natur's own pattern for he-man fightin'. It should be encouraged."

Willis showed the whites of his eyes as he softly asked—

"You know what that all means?"

"I invented it," said Peevy, as he stripped to the waist. "You use all your fightin' doin's, but if you bite I promise I'll break your neck."

Hell-bent Willis, in deadly earnestness, promised:

"I'll snap your neck. You boys listen to hear it go."

"If you've run out of war langwidge, brother, we might begin," said Peevy.

Gray was back, staring with round eyes at the two men. He was amazed to behold the variety of scars on his friend's back, arms, chest and shoul-

ders. It seemed as if he must have been savagely mauled, clawed and bitten by all the carnivora of North America, and for good measure had been shot and knifed quite frequently. The onlookers, also, were quick to read and appreciate such evidence. Their bearing became serious and respectful.

Willis, too, read what was written in the flesh of his opponent. It gave him new enthusiasm. In all his rough life on the river, lived in the most daredevil company that any era of development had produced, he could not recall an opponent whose defeat would add so much to his already well-known reputation. He jerked his head approvingly, and called to the Kentuckians—

"I'm goin' to have a good time."

"Let's be doin', an' have the fun over with," said Peevy. "I've got some real work to do. Can't fool round here more'n a few minutes."

Willis was upon him with the quickness and ferocity of a wildcat, two fingers darting forward to gouge the eyes. The stiff arm thrust landed on the top of the bowed head. Then they were tightly embracing. Homeric wrestlers never essayed to do each other injury more furiously than did these two men. Peevy repaid the thrust of the fingers by bringing up his hard head under his adversary's undershot jaw. Willis' face crinkled with a grimace for an instant, and he secured a hold around his opponent's neck which should have paved the way for the making good of his threat. Gray, horrified, expected each moment to hear Peevy's neck snap. A vicious stab of iron fingers over a kidney caused the tightly locked arm to loosen an instant.

Peevy ripped himself clear and was behind his man, only to find himself catapulted through the air. He lighted on all fours with the resilience of a cat. He whirled, just as Willis was upon him. None of the fascinated spectators seemed to be breathing. Calbert, witness of many bloody encounters, was unconsciously ripping his room sign in two.

Willis landed on the bowed figure with all the force and violence of which he was capable; and for the first time in years of vicious fighting he experienced a vague uncertainty. His man should have been flattened, face down, with strong legs choking the life out of him, while strong hands secured a toehold and inflicted the most excruciating pain. An obvious victory was threatened by defeat as Peevy suddenly surged upward and staggered erect, holding his opponent by the ankles. He advanced rapidly to keep his man helpless. He began dancing about until he was moving in a circle. The hands, grasping the Kentuckian's ankles, began to rise; and before the onlookers could anticipate the maneuver Peevy's revolutions lifted the elongated form clear of the ground. The whirling figure picked up more momentum as the Tennessee man settled back on his heels. And as he revolved Peevy worked to the landing.

The spectators gasped in amazement at the unexpected climax. The human teetotum suddenly loosed his grip and Willis flew out and crashed into the river. Barely had the body smacked the water before Peevy was swimming hand over hand. He seized his long black hair and, swimming on his back, kicked ashore. It spoke well for the rough code that not a man of the many Kentuckians offered to interfere to prevent further punishment, did the victor see fit to inflict it. But Peevy, breathing heavily, yet grinning with cheerfulness, released his hold and left the unconscious man on the ground. Inhaling deeply and endeavoring to cover up any signs of distress, he told the benumbed half hundred:

"He's a right prime man for any work. He's got fightin' guts. He's your boss. You'll take orders from him. He'll take orders from me. Let him alone till he gits his wind back. Then you will be earnin' good hard money. Prob'ly lots of fun doin's in the job."

A veteran, speaking for his com-

panions, stepped forward and gravely said:

"We're your men, mister. We'll hark to anything he passes on. Most of us are sort of rough an' have the bark on. I 'low I'm speakin' for all these men."

He wheeled and stared at his silent companions. As if some signal had been given, every right arm was stretched toward the sky.

Willis groaned and rolled on his side. None went to help him. It was part of the code. He managed to raise himself until he rested on his knees. He thrust two fingers into his mouth and yanked out a tooth. Then his long face crinkled in a grin of appreciation. His voice sounded weak as he told Peevy:

"You win. But I ain't had so much fun since I fit two eagles a hundred feet from the ground. What do we do first, you old hellion?"

"Cross over into the swamps an' fetch out a score of stolen flats an' take 'em down to N'Orleans, where we'll prob'ly have a real wring with river pirates."

Willis crawled to his feet, his voice rasping like a file biting into metal, and told the Kentuckians:

"Boys, you all heard them noble words. Pirates or devils, we'll swim the flats through. Three cheers an' a tiger for Cunnel Peevy, then we'll be burnin' up the crossin' to the flats."

The answering shout could be heard in the Upper Town. Peevy, much pleased with his new title, struck hands with Willis and said:

"Cap'n, you're the boss. I'll do the payin'."

CHAPTER VIII

RIVER TRAPS

THE going of the boatmen across the river caused much speculation among the citizens of the Lower Town. The exodus greatly increased the divekeepers' respect for the tall Tennessee man. When one could best Hellbent Willis in a wring, his rating was bound to go up.

Peevy wore his new honors as he did his old clothes, carelessly. He was diplomat enough not to join the flotilla of small craft. Willis knew his work as well as any man between Louisville and New Orleans. Gray went along in his capacity of clerk, taking with him what invoices he and Peevy had found in their investigation of the hidden fleet.

Bim watched the departure of the Kentucky men with lack-luster eyes and proceeded to go through the manual. As word had passed that he was under Peevy's protection, he was not bothered.

Peevy, always closely attended by the big dog, conferred with Calbert. A soft tap on the door halted the talk. It was one of the cooks, who came to announce—

"Man out here in store clothes mighty keen to see Cunnel Peevy."

The Southerner picked up a long pistol from the bed and thrust it through the front of his belt and went forth, the big dog at his heels. He was surprised and delighted to behold the smiling face of Colonel Pointer. Calbert, who had met the colonel several times, gave courteous greeting, and was quick to suggest:

"Use my room. You two must have much to say to each other."

The black dog nosed around the colonel, who uneasily complained:

"Such a fierce beast! Is his company necessary?"

"Gentle as a kitten," assured Peevy. "He came along, happened to meet me an' sort of adopted me. Here, pup!" The dog came to heel. "We'll use Cal's room. Powerful glad to see you. I've got big news doin's to pour into your ear."

In the privacy of Calbert's bedroom, Peevy asked:

"Which way you come down? What give you the hot foot?"

"I started after receiving a letter from Lane telling what had happened at Ford's Ferry. Made me scared of the river. Of certain portions of it. Where

is young Gray? I bring letters for him from his father and a young lady."

"The deceitfulin' little cuss! Got a woman, eh? He's across in the overflowed land. Cunnel, what do you think? Him an' me found twenty flats that was stole an' moored over in the black water."

"Gracious! That's fine! Now to find the rascals who took the goods and the men who bought them."

"Goods ain't been took," Peevy chuckled. "An' they ain't goin' to be took. I've hired fifty Kentucky hellcats to float 'em down to N'Orleans. Say, Cunnel, I've got more to tell than you could swaller in a month. I'll talk fast an' cut corners."

He described Gray's and his adventures since their meeting at Ford's Ferry, and concluded with a dramatic description of how Rodrick had died, and the destruction of the old mansion by fire.

Wide eyed, the colonel listened. When Peevy had ended his startling recital, Pointer exclaimed:

"Good heavens! And that fire! That was bad. If you only could have secured the records which you have mentioned!"

Peevy grinned complacently and boasted:

"Books an' papers are safe. I sent 'em up over the Trace in charge of a friend. He has along with him five fire eatin' Kentucky varmints as a bodyguard."

"Why, I passed six men on horses," said the colonel. "They were so heavily armed, and looked so desperate, that I drew aside and kept my hands on my holster pistols. The pity of it!"

"They don't need no pity. That is, the Kentuckians don't."

"I was thinking of the trouble I could have saved all of them and us at this end of the trail," sighed the colonel, "had I known their business. I could have proven my identity, could have examined the criminal evidence very quickly, and they could have proceeded direct to Mr. Gray."

"They wouldn't let you see anything. They'd 'low it was some game. That you wan't Cunnel Pointer. They grow thick skulls in old Kentucky when you try to make a man go agin orders."

"Well, well. Can't be helped now. A mighty big achievement! I congratulate you. Just what did you learn from the books? That will help a lot."

"That this stealin', murderin' business is carried on in a top high, business-like way. Skunks knew we was comin'. Rodrick was watchin' for us."

"But can't you give me any clues?" insisted the colonel.

"I didn't have time to bother with 'em much. Hustled to git 'em North. I see nothin' to show who X. B. is. I'll X. B. him if I find him!"

"To think of Cassit, that polished gentleman, being a member of a criminal organization!"

"He's gone where the woodbine twineth."

The colonel tossed up his hands and asked—

"But where are we to find an explanation of all these puzzles?"

"I was sort of thinkin' of N'Orleans. I'm goin' down there with the flats. Now that you've showed up, you can handle the sale of the goods."

"Peevy, you've been magnificent. I'll take a keel boat and hurry on and have everything in readiness. I'll start as soon as I can find boat and crew. God bless you, Peevy. Tell young Gray I left the same for him."

Once his desire was known, the colonel was quickly accommodated; and soon he was racing down the middle of the river. Peevy then informed Calbert:

"I can change my plans, now that the cunnel is ahead to look after the business end of all these doin's. I'm crossin' to hustle along the work. Young Gray won't do much work for awhile after gittin' his letters. Cal, remember when the first love arrer hit ye? Lawdy! I can see Jemima this minute, a slip

of a gal, when I told her we was goin' to be married."

"Think of you having sentiment!"

"I was all heart when I first see Jemima. She was no bigger'n my fist, but mighty high strung. When I told her I was goin' to make her happy as soon as I could run down an' hawg-tie a circuit rider, she give me a look I ain't never forgot. She was standin' in the door of the cabin, with a fryin' pan in her hand. When I woke up she was inside the cabin, an' the door was barred. Just that quick, nervous kind. Afterward said she hit me afore she thought how awkward it would be if I'd died on the premises. Our love's never thinned any since that long ago day. Bet a gallon of common ruin agin a coonskin that she's in the door now, waitin' for me."

"She must have lots of patience to stand and wait till you make New Orleans and back," remarked Calbert.

"She don't know where I am. What she don't know can't worry her."

Peevy made for the landing and pushed Calbert's skiff into the water. The dog preceded him and Bim followed. The two men heard the boatmen singing a river chantey before they sighted them. Peevy knew the flats already were moving through the swamp grass of the backwater. Clear of the tugging current, he rested and waited for the fleet to come to him. The first boat to turn the muddy point was a big ark with a small house amidships. Willis, as captain of the fleet, was on this, as also was young Gray. Peevy ran alongside and Gray made the skiff fast. Preceded by Bim and the dog the Southerner boarded the huge craft and announced:

"Big news. Cunnel Pointer came to the landing a few hours back. He's tearin' down the river in a fast keel to handle the business of sellin' the cargoes. Give me his blessin'. Left one for you."

Gray's face grew sober. He said:

"Sorry to miss him. I'd like to have heard about the folks."

"Dawg-gone! He fetched a letter from your pap."

Gray snatched it and read it with avidity. After finishing, he said:

"Poor dad! He's sadly worried. Heard about the devil-cat. Wish I'd had brains enough to send him a letter by Allen."

He stared over the sullen waste of water and swampland. Peevy frowned and searched his clothes.

"Ding bust! I'm almost sure there was two letters."

Gray wheeled about, his eyes anxious.

"A second letter? And you think you've lost it?" he asked.

"Well, I ain't just lost it. But I don't seem to find it."

Then, unable longer to witness his partner's blank disappointment, he fished the second missive from his pocket.

Gray hurried into the deckhouse to be alone. Willis curtly reported to Peevy:

"We'll be driftin', once the rest of the flats come along. We'll boom right down to N'Orleans, day 'n' night. We'll be strung out a trifle, but each boat has its orders. I've warned the men that if any flat is stranded I'll rip some human hides clear of their moorin's."

"You're the boss," reminded Peevy. "I'm just a passenger who's willin' to work his way. You know your job. That's why I picked you. If I git underfoot, kick me out. I'm playin' second fiddle in this part of the doin's. I will take orders, same's any river rat, till we're snug under the levee. By that time Cunnel Pointer will have everything fixed, so I won't have to lift a finger."

AS THE ark moved sluggishly along the mud bank where Gray and Bim spent the night, the latter emerged from the little cabin and recognized the spot. Approaching Peevy, he pointed and said something which was lost in

the confusion caused by the sharp crack of a rifle. With a sharp cry a boatman staggered and all but lost his long sweep.

Peevy reacted almost instantly by leaping to Bim and snatching the musket from the eccentric's hand and returning the murderous shot. The force of the heavy charge caused the Tennessee man to stagger back, drop the gun and clap a hand to what he firmly believed to be a broken shoulder. At the same moment the figure of a man popped from the rank vegetation, horribly mutilated about the head and chest, dying on his feet. The body collapsed and plunged under the dark water.

"They've commenced their murderin' tricks almost before we git started!" howled Peevy. Then, rubbing his shoulder, he added, "But I'd almost as soon be him as me."

Willis barked a command. Two men, armed with rifles, dropped into the trailing skiff, rapidly gained the bank and plunged ashore. After a few minutes they returned and reported that they could find no signs of more than the one assassin. Peevy skilfully attended to the wounded boatman, whose wound narrowly escaped being mortal. Peevy spoke aside with Willis, and warned:

"That's a fair sample of what we're in for, I reckon. Murder doin's most of the trip down. You can sort of protect yourself by pilin' some of the cargo above deck."

"No!" snapped Willis. "The boys know what they be in for. Part of the game. Can't handle flats an' be in hidin' at the same time. Cargo on deck would make us topheavy. When we git to plain sailin' I'll squat on top the house with a few rifles. I can hit either end of a white bean you care to name at half a mile."

"Thank the Lawd you're a real boatman an' not one of them triflin' boasters! I've *split* a bean at that distance." Then he found Gray and asked, "Good letter from your gal?"

"Fine! But she wants me to turn right around and go home."

The big ark entered the river and caught the current. If Peevy thrilled with a sense of victory as he looked astern and beheld the procession of salvaged flats wallowing awkwardly along, he betrayed no elation. His angular face was dour of expression as he talked with Willis. Gray was openly enthusiastic over the wholesale recovery of the stolen cargoes.

Willis was concerned solely with the technique of navigating the fleet for some three hundred miles. As his critical gaze surveyed the uneven line, he grumbled:

"Flat next to the hindmost ain't loaded even. May have to tie up an' straighten out her ladin'."

"Noticed she was listin' a trifle; but so long as she keeps on top the river it ain't worth fussin' over."

"It counts for mountains with me, Cunnel Peevy," crisply replied Willis.

"You're the cap'n," meekly conceded Peevy.

"She can haul up at St. Catherine's Creek, eight miles down, an' straighten her cargo."

He secured a piece of board and scrawled his instructions, threw the message astern and waved his ragged hat to attract the attention of the second flat. A skiff promptly put out to retrieve the message; and in a short time the order had been relayed to the faultily laden craft.

Six miles below Natchez the flotilla split, the advance keeping to the right of Island 115, while the rearmost, being beyond midstream, found it more convenient to pass down the channel between the island and the east shore. Both channels were equally safe, except in low water. The island, three miles long, was heavily wooded. Willis, talking with Peevy, and from habit watching the shoreline to estimate the time he was making, suddenly tripped Peevy off his feet and fell on top of him. Be-

fore the two men struck the deck a rifle bullet had jerked Willis' hat far to one side. Jumping to his feet, Willis bellowed through his cupped hands:

"Two men ashore! Git the skunk!"

Almost immediately a boat put off with two riflemen and rapidly gained the island. Young Gray, strongly affected by the grim, ruthless tragedy of it all, stood as if petrified, his mouth agape, and glared at the screen of foliage. Willis pulled off his hat and surveyed it angrily. Peevy, without a word, thrust forward his hand. Willis grinned rather sheepishly and returned his attention to the island, which appeared to be floating upstream. The boatmen watched and listened, to keep tabs on what might happen.

A rifle cracked with a thin, whip-like report. Peevy said:

"Same gun that sp'iled your hat, Cap'n Willis. Feller's smart in loadin'."

Then came the sound of two rifles, fired close together. Willis smiled grimly, nodded approvingly and explained:

"My two boys. Had him treed. Skunk reckoned he was all right when one fired. T'other plugged him. Can always tell when their guns are talkin'."

They watched astern until the two boatmen came to the shore and entered their boat. They placed something in the water and then made for their flat. The "something" bobbed along. Willis, very curious, sent a man in the skiff to investigate. They were soon back, grinning broadly. Gray stared down on what they had retrieved, and gave a little cry of disgust.

"What's ailin' of you, mister?" asked Willis. "Only the sculp of the skunk, who tried to shoot Cunnel Peevy."

The big dog, heretofore dozing behind the small cabin, now came to his haunches and sounded a death howl. Peevy drew Gray aside, clapped a hand on his shoulder and gravely said:

"It would be fine if you didn't have to see any of the ugly side of these river doin's. But there ain't no law down here, exceptin' what our rifles teach."

"But scalping! A white man never should do that!"

"Big river's to blame," soothed Peevy. "Always have bad doin's on big water. Look at Noah. Derned fool to take all them four-footed, man-eatin' doin's on his ark. No boatman on the Mississippi would be fool enough to do that."

Gray replied—

"The time must come when any one will be safe from lawless men while floating the entire length of this river."

"That's right. Even red Injuns will be kind an' neighborly."

Two hours later, when passing the mouth of St. Catherine's Creek, the next to the last flat attempted to enter an inlet to restow her cargo. She was fired upon, and a boatman went down with a bullet through his leg.

Willis roared and raged and, when he could articulate, he cried:

"The devils have planted killers on every island an' at every bend, with orders to git us. Ain't nothin' fair about it. Means we must run a gauntlet that's three hundred miles long."

WHEN the night thickened, only stern lanterns were lighted. The big ark, as pathfinder in the wide waste, was maneuvered largely according to the pictures of the river which Willis carried in his mind. They passed flats tied up for the night; and heard fiddles and the heavy stamping of dancing feet. From other moorings came the sound of voices raised in the crude harmony of some "lonesome" tune.

It was a wondrous starlight night. When Gray, who had been asleep in the deckhouse, awoke, he was surprised to find the flats moored along the west shore in a shallow eddy. It was possible to leap from one flat to another, and this accessibility permitted Willis to summon some of his men to a brief council. Gray was in time to hear Willis conclude an order by saying:

"I reckon we all understand. Keep well out, with rifles ready. If they don't make a try at that place, I've missed my guess."

Gray sought Peevy for enlightenment. He correctly surmised that the Kentuckian did not relish being questioned even by a Gray. Peevy explained:

"We're layin' by so's to pass the mouth of the Red in the first light. If there only was a five-mile ditch across the Great Cut-off, we'd save fifty miles of floatin'. Some day I'll git mad an' dig it. If the whole river was straightened out, as it oughter be, one could git to N'Orleans afore he started. But I have a heap of respect for that old Red River. Last of the big rivers to flow into this granddaddy of all rivers. Rises down in Mexico. Didn't like where it was born an' hypered up into our country. Some miles upstream is what we call a 'raft.' Big trees git washed into the river an' lodge. They cover the whole channel. Trees an' bushes grow on that jumble. River's floored over. At times chunks break off an' float down into the Mississip'. Floatin' islands. Have to watch out for 'em. But after it gits light, an' we see the channel's clear, we'll go hell-a-hootin'."

"Loaded rifles will be used to shoot the floating islands," Gray ironically repeated.

Peevy surrendered and explained:

"Willis reckons some of the varmints may make a try for us near the mouth of the Red. We're just bein' keerful, that's all."

The big dog crowded jealously between them and growled complainingly. Peevy roughly rubbed the brute's head and said:

"Tryin' to tell me something. Mebbe he thinks he smells trouble ahead. But if any Peevy wasn't in trouble he'd be homesick."

When the mists began to rise, Willis gave an order which was quickly passed along the row of flats, and the big ark was worked out into the channel.

"Nine miles to the Red," Peevy informed Gray. "Plenty of time to eat breakfus."

A scant two hours later Willis was staring ahead at a floating mass of trees and bushes.

"Chunk from the big raft has busted loose an' found the old river," he remarked. "Got to be keerful, or we'll have the bottom snatched out of us."

Gray studied the tangle of matted roots and heaped up tree trunks. The boatmen were laboring to pass to the left of this menace, fearing to venture between it and the mouth of the mighty Red, where other segments of the giant obstruction might be disgorged at any time. Peevy gave it an idle glance; then shaded his eyes and stared keenly.

"What trouble's loose now, Cunnel?" growled Willis.

"Don't understand why that raft should take more liberty with this river than we do. Can't see why it don't turn an' float downstream quick with the current, 'stead of making so far out."

Willis shaded his eyes and observed more keenly. Then he was frantically waving his arms and crying:

"Down flat! Guns ready! Mr. Gray, you dig to cover."

"I'll take my chances—"

"You git! Want me to take you by the nape of the neck an' heave you in there?" roared Willis.

Gray quickly obeyed. From a small window he studied the lazily moving menace. Astern, the flats were swimming after their leader in irregular formation. Bim entered the cabin, presented arms and dropped into a corner. Peevy appeared long enough to thrust the dog inside.

One of the men excitedly yelled—

"It's mostly a mess of keels, covered with tree limbs and bushes."

As if this outcry were a signal, a crackling fire sounded on the man-made floating island. The mask of foliage became somewhat dislodged. Two keel

boats were partly protected on the upstream side by the trunk of a big tree. Gray, at the small window, believed he had counted a dozen in the floating ambush. Willis yelled for his men to send the ark against the trap and to lie flat once assured the collision would occur. Wallowing like some prehistoric aquatic monster, the big ark struck against the butt of the tree, and under this ponderous impact one of the keels half filled with water. A volley of frantically fired lead scored the planking of the ark and the thick wall of the deckhouse.

The ark drifted on, floating broadside to the current, the men having abandoned the sweeps to lie prostrate. The second flat, having had more time in which to maneuver, scored a square hit on the ambush. Peevy, Willis and a boatman fired at three men suddenly exposed, and two dropped lifeless over the side of the boat.

The mass of logs and the green stuff slowly began to disintegrate after the lumbering assault of the third flat. The men in the second keel took to the water and sought safety behind the big bole. Whether these were drowned, or managed to get ashore, none on the arks could know.

Not until Bayou Tunica, below the Three Sisters Islands, was reached did Willis signal for a rendezvous. The Tunica, being a small stream, affected the anchorage none. After the Kentuckians had assembled on the shore, Willis found two men had been wounded and one killed. As there was a considerable settlement at the mouth of the bayou Willis arranged to leave his wounded there. The whole adventure, now the excitement was over, left Gray much saddened. He assured his companions that the family of the dead man would be suitably cared for. That night Willis drew Gray and Peevy aside and told them:

"Question is, can I understand better what's likely to come up if you-uns talk plainer? Don't want to know nothin' if my knowin' won't help you-uns."

Peevy exchanged a glance with Gray and then proceeded to sketch a strong outline of all that had happened. Willis promptly declared:

"Bet my wages agin your topknot, Cunnel Peevy, that the skunks den up at The Place of the Cat. I know N'Orleans from peel to core, core to peel. No honest riverman ever could git inside those doin's. It ain't a hangout for Frenchmen. Only certain ones are wanted."

CHAPTER IX

X. B.

IT LACKED an hour of sunset when Willis barked sharp orders, and the flats nosed in under the levee, in one of the busiest marts of the Western world. Slaves were dancing and singing on the broad embankment. Could Gray have unscrambled the babel of languages, he would have found Spanish, French, Portuguese, as well as English. French culture and backwoods America met along the waterfront. Indians and negroes represented semi-independence and absolute slavery.

After so much isolation and danger, the sociability of the shifting scenes made a strong appeal to Gray. Each minute he was witnessing more carefree happiness than he had found throughout the whole of the long journey. Did one care to express himself in dance or song, it appeared to be eminently the proper thing to do. Of all the varied types he beheld, he believed the slaves were the happiest. If fate gave them bondage, it also bestowed the inestimable boon of laughter.

He was aroused from his musing by a hearty voice calling him by name. Then Colonel Pointer was aboard, shaking hands and pouring out queries as to what adventures the fleet had experienced.

"I see bullet holes in several of the flats," he remarked.

Peevy came forward, gripped the colonel's hand and reported:

"Nice trip. Good fightin' for most of the way. Head chief of the river devils planted men in hidin' to murder us almost before we could git started."

"I'm impatient to hear a detailed account, but that must wait a bit. All the cargoes are sold. I had no trouble in arranging that."

"Fine doin's. Every time I come here I think of Old Hickory an' the drubbin' he give the British at Chalmette. Opine to go out there afore I go back. Bet I can find just where I stood when the reg'lars made their attack."

Gray, staring at the big ship lying alongside, tugged at the colonel's sleeve and asked—

"What did that vessel fetch down here to sell?"

"Miscellaneous cargo. From New York. Of equal importance to this town is the half million dollars in specie she fetched along for sugar and other products. But come ashore. Fine coffee house close by. Captain Willis, can't you join us for a cup of wine?"

"I'll foller ye. Odds an' ends of fixin's to tend to. Sleep here. Won't give no shore leaves till after every flat is unloaded."

"You'll find us at The Sign of the Wolf, on the corner, where you can see the black girl in a red dress dancing." Then to Peevy, "Good beds there."

"Thankee, Cunnel. Reckon we best bide aboard here till the boats are empty."

As the three were descending from the levee the black dog erupted from the deckhouse and followed them. Almost immediately he was the center of a pack of snarling, wolfish curs. With incredible quickness for a brute so large he quickly put his assailants to flight, with the exception of two he killed.

The colonel remarked—

"I'd think that beast might cause you trouble."

"Trouble is the first name of ever' Peevy I ever met. Pup's all right if let be. Perfect gentleman if nobody steps on his paws."

Gray, who was glancing back over his shoulder looking for the dog, startled his companions by exclaiming sharply. Before they could question him, he excitedly announced:

"Saw one of the men who attacked us upriver. Red whiskers, and eyes very close together."

"Where? Where?" cried Peevy.

Gray pointed to a busy corner. The three hastened there, but saw nothing of the suspect. Returning to the shop, they soon were seated in a back room, off a narrow court. The colonel ordered wine, but Peevy called for a jug of whisky. The colonel's brows went up and he quizzically asked—

"Going to drink all of it?"

"Prob'ly Willis will want some."

After satisfying himself that no eavesdroppers were lurking in the court, the colonel told his companions:

"The enemy is here. Strongly entrenched, I fear. I do not go out nights alone, or unarmed. I know that I am watched. Willis better keep his men on the boats."

"Them damn skunks own this town?" indignantly asked Peevy. "Keep fifty Kentucky wildcats mewed up on flats in this 'ticular town? Mebbe it can be did when you can coax the Mississip' to flow north'ard."

"Caution is better than valor down here," warned the colonel. "A brave dead man can't do much for himself or his friends. But Willis knows his business if ever a man did."

Peevy drank a big glass of raw whisky as one might slake his thirst with water. Then he leaned across the table and whispered—

"Ever hear of The Place of the Cat?"

The colonel elevated his brows and murmured:

"Odd name. I don't recall ever hearing of it. But there are so many wine shops and eating houses with such names I do not attempt to remember

them. What about this place you mention? Famous for good cooking, or a particular brand of drink?"

"Infamous for being, as we suspect, the headquarters of some bloody rascals," explained Gray.

"Then I don't want to go near it," emphatically declared the colonel. "You can find enough hot tempers down here without visiting any place where they specialize in blood letting. Where did you hear about it? I thought I knew this town quite well, although only down here about once a year."

"Boatmen's talk upriver," said Peevy.

"If those fellows don't know where it is, then it can't exist." Pointer next addressed Gray, to give emphasis to his warning, and said, "You must not wander around at night, as you would in a Northern town. The citizens here are generous and hospitable. But scum from all over the world drift in on ships. The seven seas send much evil. There are scores along the levees every night who will gladly cut a throat on the chance of finding a piece of hard money in the victim's pocket."

Gray glanced through a window as if expecting to behold an assassin plying his trade. The colonel again warned him—

"Beware of the scum from ships."

"An' what the old Mississip' fetches down," added Peevy, as he refilled his glass. "I'd think some of the critters would try for that half million of specie the big boat fetched in."

"Too big a game. To try that the rascals would need to be many and well organized."

"Some of our upriver pirates might try it," Gray suggested. "They managed to steal twenty flatboats."

"But surely not all at once," reminded the colonel. "And they had a good hiding place to moor them in. And after they had taken all the risks and had gone to all that bother, the flats were recovered—thanks to you, Peevy."

"Here is Willis," announced Gray.

The boatman wrinkled his nose in disdain as he beheld the wine. Then his eyes lighted up as he discovered the jug on the floor by Peevy's chair. He demanded—

"How much headway on me, Cunnel?"

Peevy held up two fingers. Willis poured and drank two glasses in quick succession. Then he inquired of Pointer:

"Cunnel, how soon will your buyers be ready to take the goods? I'm keen to unload. Boys don't like to stay aboard nights. Told them they can't go ashore till the cargoes are in the warehouses. When I left they was fightin' among themselves."

"I'll arrange matters this evening so you may begin discharging cargoes tomorrow morning. I've arranged for the sale of the flats for what lumber is in them. I will secure keel boats for the home trip. Those who choose may quit the river at Natchez and go up the Trace."

Peevy smiled quizzically at Willis and asked:

"What's your idee of doin's this evenin'? Stay here an' see how close ye can git to gittin' drunk, or drift around?"

Willis was strongly tempted, but first of all came the security of the boats. It was his religion. He glumly replied:

"I'm goin' to eat an' go back to the boys. I want half a gallon of that fiery soup, bushel of crabs, twenty pounds of fish with lots of their spicy gravy, a baked chicken an' a bit of fruit. Worried so derned much I've quit hankerin' for vituals."

"Order it for four of us, Cunnel," Peevy requested.

The colonel went to the kitchen and talked with the cooks and, after the necessary time had elapsed, two men began bringing in the most excellent food that man ever ate. At least, this was Gray's strong avowal. Peevy and Willis ate as they drank, prodigiously. The colonel's appetite was soon satisfied, but he plied his companions until they

could eat no more. Then he walked with them as far as the levee. His last words were—

"Watch where you're stepping after it gets dark."

THE crew was elated to learn the cargoes would be removed on the morrow, and there was but little grumbling over the delayed shore leave. Early next morning agents for various traders appeared to inspect the cargoes; and carts pulled up to be filled and hauled away. The negro roustabouts sang as they worked; and so efficiently had the colonel attended to his duties that by early evening the flats were empty and ready to be knocked down for lumber. The colonel sent a note by a colored boy for Gray, Peevy and Willis to dine with him that evening at The Sign of the Wolf. Gray, with letters to write, and feeling very weary, sent his regrets by Peevy, and had the latter send him some supper, which he ate on the big flat.

Next morning he suspected that his two friends had had considerable "whisky doin's" the evening before. The colonel, dapper in attire and ready to make a day of it, invited Gray to see the town. As they strolled along the broad streets, the colonel pointed out various notables. Also, he gave an interesting dissertation on physiognomy, and he illustrated his talk by pointing out different racial types. He began with the blacks and Indians, and concluded with Scotch, Irish, English, French and Portuguese.

Calls were made on city officials and dignitaries. The colonel evinced great pride in presenting his young friend. Business acquaintances were made for the mutual good of factor and up-country merchant. Gray was convinced there was no other place in all North America where the people would make one feel so thoroughly at home. He was speaking of this impression as they were returning to the river. Suddenly he broke off and seized his companion by the arm.

"What's the matter, son?" murmured the colonel, darting his fierce gaze about.

Gray pointed and whispered:

"There it is! The Place of the Cat! See! That's what is meant for a cat. All in gilt."

The colonel gazed for a bit at the peculiar type of feline, more reminiscent of a panther than a household tabby.

"You come with me," he said. "If it's the sort of nest you've reported it to be, I believe I have enough influence to induce the authorities to do a little housecleaning."

He led the way to the waiting room of a pretentious office and requested Gray to excuse him for a few minutes. He was gone twenty minutes. Joining Gray, he conducted him from the building, reporting:

"The authorities will investigate that place before sundown. If it is not all right, it will be cleaned out. The officials have supposed it to be a political club. Now we will find our friends and arrange for a luncheon."

They found Peevy and Willis at The Sign of the Wolf. Judging by the empty bottles and half empty whisky jug, a rare amount of drink had been consumed.

"Your heads are of iron and your bowels are of brass," scolded the colonel. "Do you feel like eating?"

"Come here a-purpose to eat," said Peevy gravely. "Can't live on whisky alone."

"We found The Place of the Cat," eagerly announced Gray. "Colonel Pointer set the authorities on to it."

Peevy wrinkled his brows and pessimistically observed—

"Just drivin' it from the place where you know you can find it, to a place where you can't find it."

"Evil, once scattered, loses much of its power," said the colonel. "That gilt sign will come down. The rats will be driven out. They must find a new meeting place before they can plot more

mischief."

Willis reluctantly announced that he must be returning to the boats. Suspecting the colonel had business matters to attend to, Gray voiced a similar intention.

"It's necessary for me to be busy for a part of the evening," admitted the colonel. "Say we all meet here tomorrow morning for breakfast, eight o'clock. After tonight I shall have much time to use as I please."

The breakfast appointment was readily agreed upon, and Willis and Gray returned to the empty hulls. Peevy announced his intention to call on some old acquaintances. Gray cleaned up his clerical work and found himself wishing for amusement. Peevy came aboard, and the extra smartness of his bearing suggested unusually strong potations. Willis sniffed enviously.

"How much ahead of me?"

"Half a jug," amiably confessed the Tennessee man. "After ten minutes of sleep, I'll make it a whole jug."

Gray stared blankly at the top of the levee. For the first time since he started from the forks of the Ohio he was experiencing a touch of homesickness. Perhaps it was the first opportunity he had had to indulge in that forlorn sentiment. He knew the keels had been procured and were at the disposal of the Kentucky boatmen; and that the long journey would be entered upon within a day or so. The brief interim of waiting seemed interminable.

The crew went ashore for one grand fling before buckling down to the long fight against the current. It seemed impossible to remain inactive while waiting for the dull hours to file slowly by. He wished he could sleep for twenty-four hours, but he never felt more wide awake in his life. He not only hated his loneliness, but he also was weary of staring at the top of the levee. Perhaps if the colored dancers and singers had remained he would have been more contented.

The big dog, secured by a stout rope, ranged his limit, which was the door of the deckhouse. He grumbled deep in his throat, then whined. Gray pulled his ears.

"It's all foolishness, pup. There's nothing left to steal, and they don't want any of Peevy's, or Willis's, fight. The colonel has seen to that. But you must be crazy to think I'm going to stick here to be eaten up by mosquitos without some company. Well, now you put it into my mind, I may decide to walk along the levee, just to give some new mosquitos a chance to bite me . . ."

With that he passed from flat to flat, until he came to the one watchman.

"Taking a little walk along the levee for a bit."

The man was surprised and obviously disliked this announcement.

"Not goin' ashore alone, Mr. Gray?" he said.

"Why the devil shouldn't I go alone as well as any of you fellows?"

"Our boys go in a bunch," reminded the watchman. "Reckon I might trot along with you."

"You know Willis's orders. These boats have been sold to a lumber company. No skunks should have a chance to set them on fire. Speak a word to the dog. He's mighty lonesome. I am not entering the town—just strolling along the levee for a way. Don't worry about me. I'll be back soon."

WITH that he gained the top of the fifteen-foot wide embankment and looked down on the town on one side, and the mighty river basin on the other.

He was quite content with his stroll and might not have entertained the idea of entering the town, had he not glimpsed the figure of Bim passing under a street light. The eccentric carried his musket at shoulder-arms and was very erect of figure. A secondary discovery, that Bim was in close proximity to The Place of the Cat, impelled him to ascertain if the reputed club was closed. Acting on that impulse, he scrambled

down the bank and crossed the open ground to the first street, and soon oriented himself after coming to a two-story house. Inasmuch as most of the houses were but one story in height, and as Colonel Pointer had informed him that this particular structure had been built since the fire of 1794, he was quick to recall it.

He moved slowly along and came to the corner where he had stood when getting his first glimpse of the gilded sign. A dim light shone in the rear of the building. There was no other illumination, and he believed the city authorities had been prompt in taking action and that the one light bespoke a caretaker.

He strolled along until nearly opposite the building. The thin rays of a light, feeding through a window, partly revealed his figure. He was surprised and highly pleased to hear a genial voice calling out:

"Why, bless my soul! How did you come here?"

"I'm supposed to be on the flat, Colonel," he explained. "Got tired of it and decided to take a walk. Peevy and Willis won't approve, yet you're the most dangerous person I've spoken to thus far."

"I believe you were ill advised to leave the boats, knowing that Peevy would not approve. However, you're here. You must have noticed a light at the rear of The Place of the Cat."

"I was quick to see it, but not surprised. I assumed the tenants had been ousted and a man stationed there to protect the property."

"Correct. I recommended the caretaker—a very reliable fellow. I was about to look in on him. Suppose we both drop in and learn what kind of wine those rascals drank? As they stole it, they're bound to drink the best. Wanted Peevy to come along, but he doesn't care for wine and he was keen to find Willis."

As he talked he led the way across the street to beat a light tattoo on the door. After a brief pause a deep voice challenged—

"Who's there?"

"Colonel Pointer and a young friend from up the river, Jacques."

The door was promptly opened and the two men stepped inside. The caretaker led the way with his tallow dip, then lighted several candles in a semi-circular room. It was well furnished with small tables and light bamboo chairs, and boasted a fountain in the center. Obviously it was a drinking place, although no bar or stock was to be seen.

Pointer rubbed his hands briskly and told the caretaker—

"A bottle of my usual choice." Then to Gray, "The scoundrels decamped in such a hurry they had no time to remove as fine a vintage as you ever tasted. I'll have Peevy and Willis here tomorrow if I can separate them from their cursed whisky."

"The Place of the Cat," mused Gray, more interested in his surroundings than in the forthcoming drink. "Reminds me of the devil-cat at Ford's Ferry. The name, I mean. Wonder if any of our upriver nuisances met here."

"Son—" the colonel lowered his voice, although they were alone— "I have every reason to believe that the brains of that band of villains used this place as a counting room and clearance house. Agents from various points along the several waterways would come here at stated times, I fancy, and make their reports. Some were coiners. Some were footpads along the Natchez Trace, many were river pirates. And I have no doubt but that they also reaped a rich harvest by stealing niggers upcountry and fetching them down here to sell. Their outlawry had more ramifications than one would ever imagine. I've collected lots of information about the band since you started out to look into the deaths of your three boatmen."

"They must have been well organized, with a very cunning leader," said Gray.

"And some of them must have been

highly artistic," added the colonel. "You haven't noticed the decoration of the walls."

He held the candle high above his head so that Gray could observe the mural decorations. These were extremely bizarre, with feline heads, variously distorted, threaded on a gilt ribbon, as the main motif.

The return of the caretaker, with tray, bottle and glasses, interrupted further examination of the interesting drawings. The man deftly opened the wine and retired.

The colonel filled the glasses at once and sniffed the bouquet with the pleased appraisal of a connoisseur. Gray tossed his off and commented—

"An excellent vintage."

The colonel, holding his glass in one hand and the candle in the other, continued to study the decorations. To Gray, the heads of the cats suddenly took on satanic malevolence. The heads seemed to be moving along the gilt ribbon as if it were a runway. As he placed his glass on the table he discovered that his hands were benumbed. He stared stupidly.

The colonel lighted a cheroot and toyed with his glass.

Gray remarked—

"You do not drink." His voice in his own ears sounded thick, and he moistened his lips and dully wondered why, of a sudden, he should feel so heavy and unwieldy. He managed to say, "I'd like that man to bring me—water."

"They usually crave water after drinking that wine," suavely said the colonel as he emptied his glass on the floor, and smiled. "The bouquet is not quite as delicate as that our poor Cassit used to serve. But I think you'll find it's just as potent."

"Colonel, what are we talking about?" thickly asked Gray. "Are we talking or am I dreaming?"

"You may be dreaming a trifle. And I'm sure your sleep will be very sound."

"I hear you—a million miles away—we walked—"

THE colonel's hand struck him across the face. He staggered back, yet he had not felt the impact of the blow. From a great distance came the hard, curt voice, saying:

"You damned young meddler! You'd run down the river pirates, would you? You'd carry death to Cassit and Rodrick, would you? That ape friend of yours would trap X.B, would he?"

Each query, with no pause for the victim to answer, was accompanied by a slap in the face.

"You X. B!" Gray managed to gasp as he slumped into a chair.

"Yes. And I have all your goods. Good of you to fetch the flats down here. As you'll never tell, I'll confess to you that the men who use this place are now looting the big ship of a half million in specie. We're an old broom in the Mississippi Valley, but we've swept clean. The half million ends our work on the river. Can you hear me? I'm leaving you with Jacques. You'll sleep too sound to feel his knife."

Gray, deaf to the evil promise, still retained his vision. He saw the blinds of a window suddenly open. There followed the crashing of glass. Gray saw the gun barrel and the face behind it. He was on the edge of oblivion, yet was able to realize he could hope for no succor from the eccentric.

"Go away, fool!" cried Pointer, and he drew a pistol.

"Present firelock! Aim! Fire!" chanted Bim—and a deafening explosion filled the room.

Gray, through clouded eyes, saw the figure of Pointer topple backward and crash to the floor. He had no sensation of having been unconscious when he heard Peevy's voice.

"That stuff can't kill. Just deadens. Breathes right, heart's right."

By a mighty effort, Gray opened his eyes. He was in the room where he had been drugged. He was drenched with water from the fountain. Bim was parading back and forth, the musket

on his shoulder, as one who does sentry duty.

"Feel bad, son?" softly asked Peevy.

"No—drugged. Head aches. No chance to swap glasses—this time." He paused and panted for breath, and then lamented, "To think the colonel was that sort—X.B!"

"Oughter guessed him clear through," growled Peevy. "Rare hellion doin's. S'pected about every one but him. Thank God you still live."

"Bim—saved me."

"Crash of his gun fetched us here. I'm buyin' him the best gineral's uniform in Ameriky. Sash of seven colors. Three-foot sword. When I busted in, he was throwin' water on you. He now thinks Pointer was Lawd Cornwallis. Fetches him mightly close to Yorktown. War's nearer finished then I'd 'lowed. Lucky for you, son, he didn't happen along after peace had been made. Now to git you back to the keels. Willis went to claim all the goods we fetched down, the same bein' stored away by Pointer in his own name."

"Pointer said his men were raiding the big specie ship," laboriously said Gray, as the boatman picked him up.

"Shot to pieces as they rushed the gangplank. I want to be fair an' honest. Willis an' me nearly had another wring just afore this happened. I blamed it on the whisky he'd histed in. He let on that something was wrong with Pointer."

From the doorway a deep voice cried:

"You're a liar! You blatted that first, after the 'thorities told you Pointer hadn't mentioned this den." And Willis, with a jug in his left hand, entered the room and grinned his congratulations at young Gray. "Why don't you give him a drink? Must be some honest wine here."

"No! I never want to taste wine again."

"When in doubt, make t'other feller drink first," advised Peevy. "Hi, Willis, ain't your boys earned a drink? Big doin's in the cook room."

"Cunnel Peevy, I'll boss my own crew," Willis haughtily replied. Then to his men, "You wildcats can drink one bottle apiece. Then I want you to show Mr. Gray how men from old Kentuck leave a place what they don't go for to like."

"No place for you, son," warned Peevy. "We'll sort of stand across the street. It wa'n't no Joshua an' a trumpet that blew down the walls of Jericho. It was Kentucky boatmen."

They withdrew, Gray clinging to Peevy's brawny arm for support. After a brief delay, or long enough for the boatmen to swallow a bottle of wine, The Place of the Cat became strangely agitated, as if it were constructed of malleable material. The walls bulged; the roof buckled; and then the whole structure disintegrated. A litter of broken timbers and a cloud of dust were all that awaited the hurried investigation of the city authorities.

As the keels were approaching Baton Rouge, Peevy asked his young employer:

"Of all our doin's, what give you the most simon-pure fun? Hard for me to make a ch'ice atween Ford's Ferry an' Natchez an' N'Orleans. Of course, we had good rinktums all the way down."

"I'm mighty glad I came down here and proved to that poor woman back home that a Gray isn't afraid to go where he sends his boatmen. But to be back home! Looking down on the Forks of the Ohio, with a young woman by my side, whom I expect to marry very soon—all that is some mighty pleasing doings, 'Cunnel' Peevy."

"Till you come to that happy day you can say that you never surrendered, much," philosophically remarked the Tennessee man.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

GEORGES SURDEZ, who wrote "Tomtoms", in this issue, tells us something of the fighting caliber and loyalty of the Senegalese:

New York City

Before the World War, the Senegalese already had a superb reputation for fighting. The epic of the colonial wars against Ahmadou, Samory, Tieba, Behanzin, Rabah Zobeir, offers a long list of episodes to the great credit of the blacks. General Mangin, who had served with them for years, predicted several years before the great conflict that France had "black force" available. Others, lead by General de Torcy, scoffed: The Senegalese used in Africa were picked men, according to them, the cream of their race, and if brought to France to fight, the negroes would not only be unable to stand shellfire, but would perish in the winter.

With the outbreak of hostilities, negro soldiers started to pour into France. While generally called Senegalese, a large proportion of them had been recruited in colonies other than Senegal. The Ouoloffs from Senegal, the Bambaras from the Sudan, warrior tribes both, bolstered the mass, which composed wonderful shock troops. Several hundred thousand were used at the various fronts.

As to the efficacy of the Senegalese as fighters, we Americans have Captain Thomason of the United States Marines as expert witness. In his powerful book, "Fix Bayonets!" you will remember how he describes the charge over the top of these black hosts, more reliant on the cold steel of their bolos than on their up-to-date rifles. Legion officers, too, have expressed to me their admiration for the blacks. When both the U. S. Marines and the French Foreign Legion grant testimonials to a set of fighting men, it is rather useless to insist.

AS A RULE, intense loyalty prevails in the black regiments. Since France has used negro soldiers, there is no example of a white officer being abandoned by his men.

When Lieutenant Chevigné, mortally wounded

in a combat near Timbuktu, saw that his blacks would be killed trying to save him, he blew his brains out to give them a chance. To no purpose: Living or dead, Chevigné was *their white man,* a sacred charge. They were killed protecting his body.

Even when worked upon by enemy propagandists, by Bolshevik agents, at a time when there was much uneasiness over the mental attitude of the blacks, the Senegalese did not change toward their chiefs. When the French launched their disastrous attack on the Chemin des Dames, April 16th, 1917, Captain Tainton of the Seventh Colonials fell during the rush. His loss was discovered when his shattered company reached shelter. The blacks went out, one after another, to get the body—on which the Germans, who knew Senegalese, had trained machine guns. White officers forbade further efforts to stop the killing. And, after dark, risking a court martial, the survivors crept out and brought in *their white man.*

DURING the Riff War in Morocco, in 1924, a youthful French officer blew his outpost up rather than surrender. His men died with him, willingly: They were Senegalese, had been offered an opportunity to leave but had decided to stick with *their white man.*

On the whole, the returned soldiers I saw in West Africa, soon after the Armistice, were proud to have served. Naked blacks in the forest of the Ivory Coast pulled decorations from their loincloths and dirty, worn papers on which were written fine citations. The incidents described in "Tomtoms" are true to fact, but were exceptional. Loyalty being a current that flows both ways, I have noticed that the majority of white officers grant all the devotion to their men that they receive from them.

—GEORGES SURDEZ

AN ODD bit of information on fluctuations in the abundance of wild life:

Toronto, Canada

Permit me to amplify the reply given by Mr. Davis Quinn in your issue for March 1st as to a system of periodic abundance amongst fur-bearing animals.

In *The Canadian Theosophist* (Hamilton, Ont.) for March there is a long quotation from *Science,* issue of Sept. 4th, 1931, dealing with a biological conference held at the summer home in Matamek, Quebec, of Mr. Copley Amory, of Boston, at which some thirty scientists and Canadian officials gathered to consider the problem of fluctuations among wild life.

From the resumé given in the *C. T.* it appears that such fluctuations have been known and recorded, covering periods from 30 months to 260 years; and they occur in the lives of trees, insects, fish, birds and all kinds of fur-bearing animals. A four-year cycle is well known amongst birds, lemmings and the Arctic fox, and much data is obtainable from the records of the Hudson's Bay Co.

Mr. Aldo Leopold, of Wisconsin, described a nine-year cycle occurring amongst grouse and rabbits, and Mr. DeLury, of the Canadian Observatory at Ottowa, showed an eleven-year cycle for trees, agriculture, fish and animals.

—W. J. HAYDON

A READER queries Leland S. Jamieson on the awarding of the Medal of Honor, as described in his story, "Distance" (February 1st):

U. S. A. T. *Republic,*
At Sea,
February 14, 1932

Reference "Distance" by Leland S. Jamieson. Believe that he is in error regarding the awarding of the Medal of Honor, as par. 7 Army Regulations 600-45 (Award and Supply of Decorations for individuals) states in part that "The Medal of Honor is awarded in the name of Congress to each person who, while an officer or enlisted man of the Army in action involving actual conflict with an enemy, distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty", etc.

I do not believe that the Medal of Honor is awarded during the time of peace. Am I right?

—STAFF SERGEANT, Air Corps

Here is Mr. Jamieson's reply:

College Park, Georgia

The Sergeant's point in connection with the Medal of Honor is well taken. I am well aware that *Maris* would probably not be given a Medal of Honor for his bravery. The officer who actually performed this act was decorated with the Cheney Medal—given annually to the officer who performed the most valorous deed in aviation during the year past. But I believe *Maris* could have been awarded the Medal of Honor. I grant that it would be contrary to regulations and precedent, but regulations are broken and precedents violated, even in matters of the awarding of medals.

I am unable to give an illustration of this which has occurred in the Army, but here are two from the Navy. The essential wording of the Congressional acts governing the awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor to members of the two arms of service is the same, i.e., ". . . shall hereafter, in action involving actual conflict with an enemy, distinguish himself conspicuously by

gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty . . . " Quoting from the "Record of Medals of Honor Issued to Officers and Enlisted Men of Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, 1862-1923":

"Torpedoman, second class, serving on the U. S. Submarine O-5, for heroism and devotion of duty at the time of the sinking of that vessel. On the morning of October 28, 1923, the O-5 collided with the steamship *Abangarez* and sank in less than a minute. When the collision occurred Breault was in the torpedo room. Upon reaching the hatch he saw that the boat was sinking rapidly. Instead of jumping overboard to save his own life, he returned to the torpedo room to the rescue of a shipmate who he knew was trapped in the boat, closing the torpedo-room hatch on himself. Breault and Brown remained trapped in this compartment until rescued by the salvage party 31 hours later. Medal presented by Pres. Coolidge at the White House on March 8, 1924. (G.O. 125, February 20, 1924).

"Lt. Com. Edwards, February 2, 1924, for . . . his coolness, judgment, and professional skill, which were combined with a degree of heroism that must reflect new glory on the U. S. Navy . . . in rescuing 482 men, women and children from the French Military Transport *Vinh-Long*, in the sea of Marmora, Turkey, December 16, 1922. (G.O. 123, February 2, 1924)."

IN THESE acts of valor there was no other "enemy" than circumstance and sea water. They occurred, as you will note from the dates, in peace time.

I do not have the full details on the case, but I am sure of the date—1911—in which a soldier in the Army crossed into Mexico, obtained valuable information concerning Mexican bandits' proposed raids into this country, recrossed at the risk of his life—and was awarded the Medal of Honor. If I am not mistaken, he had no actual conflict with the enemy. This occurred, of course, in peace time. If I were in Washington and could go through official files there, I am sure I could find other cases in which the actual wording of the Congressional acts had been set aside in order to reward a man for gallantry. After all, a man can be just as courageous, and can be subjected to just as much danger, in combating elements of Nature as in fighting human enemies. He has only one life to lose.

What we are discussing, however, is whether the regulations would be set aside or ignored in the case of *Maris*. I repeat that I don't believe they would be in the case as I have pictured it; yet I think they *could* have been. The President of the United States is the commander of both Army and Navy; if he can present a Medal of Honor to an officer and to a torpedoman in the Navy for hazardous rescues in peace time, it seems to me he could award one to an Army officer for an act like Maris'. But maybe I'm wrong. At any rate, you are entirely right as far as the regulations go in the matter.

—LELAND S. JAMIESON

IN CONNECTION with Stanley Vestal's recent articles on Sitting Bull, William Wells sends in another interesting—and loaded—contribution to the Camp-fire.

Portland, Oregon

As I hoped, Stanley Vestal came back at me anent my criticism of his articles on Sitting Bull. Bully—nothing like a lively scrap which may be interesting to the onlookers whatever it may be to the combatants.

I was a boy of fourteen on the plains at the time of the Custer affair and spent the next thirty years in close contact with the Indian tribes, sometimes fighting them, sometimes much among them, doing my little bit in helping to push the frontier westward. I knew personally many famous frontiersmen, some whose time went back to the days of the early fur traders, and I have talked over every great fight that ever took place on the plains during the last hundred years with men, both white and Indian, who had a part in them.

So I have a lot of first hand knowledge, a lot of second hand, and of late years I am reading everything that I can get hold of on the subject. It is rather a queer coincidence that I was reading "Buffalo Days," for about the twentieth time when Mr. Vestal's letter came.

MR. VESTAL has set out to prove that Sitting Bull was a great Indian chief and leader of the class of Pontiac and Tecumseh. Sitting Bull was a chief of the Uncapapa band of the Dakota who refused to go in to the agencies after the wars of the sixties, but remained out on the buffalo range, committing depredations on the whites, especially on miners going in to the placers of Montana, and afterward to the Black Hills. Consequently his village, which numbered about sixty lodges generally, was the headquarters for all the war parties leaving the reservations to harry the whites, then scurry back to shelter. Nobody who has seen, as I have, the remains—that is the only fitting word—of inoffensive white women and children after a war party of Indians had finished with them, has any illusions as to the noble redmen. No doubt Sitting Bull went on war parties, like any other warrior. Yellowstone Kelly, who met Sitting Bull several times long before the Custer fight, mentions Sitting Bull and his "gang of cutthroats," in his autobiography.

However, Sitting Bull, as far as is known, took no great part in leading any of the Indians in the fights of the sixties; neither was he in the

attack on Crook a week before the battle on the Little Horn. He may have fought against Reno and afterward against Reno and Benteen, but during the wiping out of Custer's battalion Sitting Bull was just where it was always charged he was—among the women and children "making medicine." Mr. Vestal admits this, although he doesn't know it. This is due to his ignorance of the terms, "medicine man," and "making medicine", in frontier vernacular.

A MEDICINE MAN, as the Indian term is translated into English may mean a healer, a physician. It may mean a conjuror who uses charms and incantations; it may mean a statesman, a counselor, a prophet, as was the Prophet, the brother and advisor of Tecumseh, just as we give the degrees M.D. and L.L.D. Sitting Bull was this last—a prophet and counselor, not a war chief.

"Making medicine", as the term is generally used, means to plan, to lay out a course of action. I, like all frontiersmen, use the term that way habitually, both in conversation and writing. When Custer called his officers together just before the battle his scouts, both white and Indian, no doubt said, "Hah, the white chiefs are making war medicine."

So, if Sitting Bull were really in command of the Indians at the fight of the Little Horn, it could be truthfully said of him that he sat on his horse among the women and children making medicine; or in other words directing the battle. That he had any sort of general command is not likely, and Mr. Vestal himself knocks that claim into a cocked hat, because his description of the fight is correct—noise, confusion, every warrior for himself. Of course war chiefs like Gall and Black Moon had their own personal following who followed them and to a certain extent fought under their orders.

MR. VESTAL'S account of the whole affair is very misleading. The attack was not a surprise. The account of the lost box of hard bread and its recovery is partly correct, although as I remember, the soldiers who went back after it did not report killing an Indian. Indian scouts —Sioux—were in Reno's front, falling back just out of rifle range before he reached the river, and if they did not see Custer's and Benteen's battalions following Reno they must have been blind. If Sitting Bull was a great general, why did he not jump Reno when the soldiers were in confusion fording the river and watering horses?

Benteen was not ordered to attack the village from the west. His battalion was sent to the left of Reno, but finding the country too rough for horses, returned to the trail down Sundance Creek and fell in between Reno and the pack train under McDougal, who had his own troop and an additional detail of six men from each of the other eleven troops, making nearly a hundred men, or more, with the pack train. Reno had something over a hundred men, Benteen a few more than Reno, Custer two hundred and eight. Custer knew that Benteen had come back to the trail and was behind Reno.

RENO, ordered to attack, forded the river and sent word to Custer that the Indians were ahead of him in force. Custer and some of his staff came out on the bluffs overlooking Reno, cheered and waved their hats; then Custer went back to his own men who were moving down some two miles back from the Little Horn to strike the village at the lower end.

Reno went forward down the valley toward the village, was attacked and driven into a bend of the river, although up to this he had only lost three men—not very hard fighting. Reno could have held on here till hell froze over because he was well protected—trees and a cut bank—and had his reserve ammunition. However, he lost courage, ordered a retreat back across the river to the bluffs, losing some thirty men while so doing, and leaving some fifteen more behind in the timber who had not heard the order in time.

CUSTER moved down opposite the lower end of the village and halted; not, however, because four Cheyenne warriors rode out in front of him. Custer had refused to believe the scouts when they told him that he was going to meet an overwhelming force of Sioux, and this was his first full view of the extent of the village. So he halted and sent a courier back to Benteen—who he knew was following—to hurry up and bring the packs, as it was a big village. Custer then formed his troops in skirmish order, some dismounted, in a line some three-quarters of a mile long, facing the river and the village on the other side. Of course this formation was wrong, as things turned out, but Custer supposed that Benteen would arrive shortly, more than doubling the force and bringing plenty of ammunition. He also supposed that Reno would hold on and keep a lot of the Indians busy.

Benteen, meanwhile, had joined Reno. Reno, being senior, took command of the combined force of more than four hundred men and refused to obey Custer's order to Benteen. The fight against Custer was now in full swing. Nearly all the Indians had left Reno, yet Reno sat there, scared to death, in full view and hearing of Custer's fight not three miles away, and would not go to his assistance. Reno's men plainly heard three distinct volleys fired by Custer's men, the well known call for help, showing that Custer's command was still organized and fighting.

ARMY officers, including General Miles, have estimated that Reno, leaving a sufficient guard with the pack train and the wounded, could in between thirty and forty minutes have struck

the rear of the Indians on that side of Custer with over three hundred men. Any one knowing what a surprise does to Indians can picture the result.

Reno stayed on his hill, entrenched, and remained there until rescued. Mr. Vestal's claim that Sitting Bull could have wiped up Reno afterward is nonsense. Once white men were entrenched they could easily hold off twenty times their number of Indians, because in such cases the red men will not charge home, as has been repeatedly proved. If Mr. Vestal wants this proof I have chapter and verse, also dates and names.

A few more wise cracks and I am done:

Frank Grouard was not a white man, but a half-breed Kanaka born in the Sandwich Islands, brought to the United States and captured by the Sioux when he was about nineteen, Sitting Bull adopting him.

I knew several white men who knew Sitting Bull well in the sixties and seventies. One of them was named Campbell, who traded with the Sioux, mainly supplying them with ammunition. He was on his way to the Sioux camps with a pack train at the time of the Custer fight and followed to the Big Horn mountains. He said that all the Indians killed in the fight were taken to the mountains for burial, which was in strict accordance with the Sioux belief and not with Mr. Vestal's story.

COW-BUFFALO skin lodges, smoke tanned to shed rain, were brown in color at first, soon becoming very dark from the smoke of the lodge fires. The skins had to be smoke tanned, for if white tanned, they would sag all out of shape, when wet, and shrink and get hard and stiff as boards when dry. I never heard of one whitened.

The Indian women, who did all the camp moving and packing, did not like mules—would not use them if it could be avoided. The back of a mule is of different conformation from that of a horse and requires a special pack saddle—*aparajo* or the like—with breeching and breast strap, which the Indians did not have. Mules are hard to handle, like to travel in a close bunch, and were very likely to run and kick the travois all to pieces, scattering kids and camp equipment from hell to breakfast. You bet, no mules for the Indian women, who are the big boss when it comes to moving camp. It took an old, gentle, swaybacked plug to make a "squaw horse".

AS FOR horses living in the Sioux country: After the Indians were placed on the reservations hundreds of thousands of cattle were driven into that country and did well, living on the grass summer and winter, until the grass was so eaten off, several years afterward, that many cattle were winter killed. Horses will live where a cow will starve to death, for horses will paw down through snow to the grass, the same as will a buffalo or an elk. A cow will starve if there is six inches of snow over the grass, but a horse will paw down through a couple of feet. The only horses that the Indians ever fed on cottonwood bark were the few kept in camp during a blizzard for wrangle horses, etc., the rest of the herds rustling as usual. If Mr. Vestal had ever rustled cottonwood bark for even half a dozen horses overnight he would know how impossible it would be to feed a large herd in that way. Many large horse outfits ranged horses through Wyoming, the Dakotas and Montana for years, never feeding them a spear of hay during the winters, until the range was eaten off. I won't ask Mr. Vestal to eat all those bones—he can set 'em up if we ever meet.

As for the Sioux being "good shots, good horsemen, the best fighters the sun ever shone on," bosh!

They were fair horsemen—about equal to white men used to horses—and the vilest shots, both with rifle and revolver, that ever came down the pike. To prove it: When Sitting Bull was killed —by his own people—according to Mr. Vestal, 4,000 shots were fired and only fifteen men hit—something like 300 shots to get one man. Good shooting, huh? And this was hand-to-hand, not long range.

I KNOW of one fight in 1877 where about thirty white men stood off 400 Sioux for several days, the whites not losing a man; and when a relieving party of a couple of hundred frontiersmen—not soldiers—showed up, the brave Sioux hit the high spots to get away.

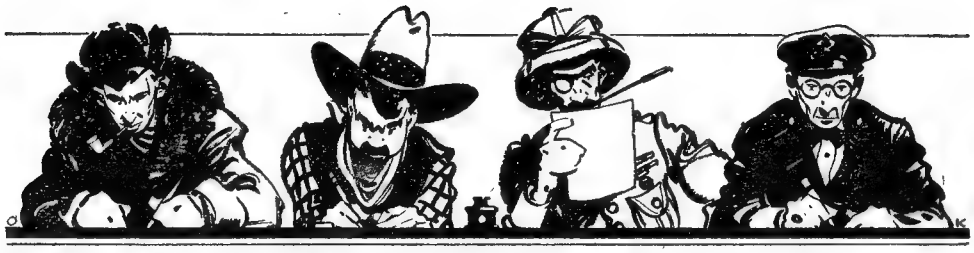
As to the supposedly Sioux proverb, "It is better to lie naked than to rot on a scaffold" will Mr. Vestal explain why the Sioux—all Indians in fact—made such desperate and generally successful efforts to carry off their dead, if it were not to give them tribal burial and provide them with food, fire, clothing, weapons and horses to use on the long lonely journey through the Sand Hills to the Land of the Hereafter?

—WILLIAM WELLS

I AM glad to call your attention again this year to the Poppy sale campaign conducted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion during Memorial Day week. The flowers, made by veterans in Government hospitals, are sold solely to provide funds for the support and amelioration of the lives of the men invalided in the war.

As a worthy aid to the disabled soldiers of our country, be sure to wear a poppy on Memorial Day!

—A. A. P.



Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Bagpipe

GORDON MacCREAGH, compleat piper, loathes the accursed rattle of pestilential drums grafted on to bagpipe bands by thickheaded soldiers in leopardskins and busbies.

Request:—"Ask Adventure has no department for music, so remembering that I once read somewhere that you played the particular instrument I am interested in, I'm picking on you to help me secure some information which you no doubt have at your fingertips.

The music of the Scotch bagpipes has always thrilled me and I have a half baked idea that I would like to learn to play them. Can you answer the following questions for me?

1. Can they be purchased in this country and have you any idea of the approximate cost?

2. Are they hard to learn to play?

3. Where could I learn to play them, if anywhere, should the long held back desire to do so become too strong to resist?

4. One other question if you don't mind: I've only a radio acquaintance with the bagpipes, usually accompanied by drums. Do they sound as thrilling alone, or is it the drums that lend them enchantment?"

—A. H. BALDWIN, JR., Kearny, New Jersey.

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—Regarding God's most noble instrument of music: True, as you say, Ask Adventure has no department for music. But Ask Adventure can answer anything—somehow, somewhere along the long line of experts.

It is interesting and illuminating to consider that probably no other magazine—even musical—could answer just your questions. I am glad to be able to help you.

1. Sure, you can purchase bagpipes in America. Carl Fisher, New York City. Address, Carl Fisher Building (near 7th St. and Fourth Ave.)

Prices range from around $90.00 and up. The cheaper sets are made in British India; the better ones in Scotland.

Like every musical instrument, a good one is a whole lot better than a poor one. In bagpipes the quality consists in mellowness of tone in the drones and in ringing clarion quality in the chanter. These qualities are usually lacking in the cheaper sets; and in the Indian-made sets it is often found that the chanter is not truly bored—that is to say, it doesn't sound a true scale.

For this reason you should by all means go to purchase accompanied by somebody who knows pipes; for high cost alone will not guarantee a really fine set of pipes, other than a lot of silver and ivory ornamentation.

2. Pipes are not hard to learn to play. *But* it takes practise and plenty of it to play well. Six months' practise on a chanter ought to see you playing a few tunes. Harry Lauder felt that he ought to be able to make a showing on his national instrument in public. I understand that he took a dozen lessons and had the nerve to tootle in public—but then he was Harry Lauder. There is a proverb amongst pipers—"It takes ten years to make a piper." But don't let that discourage you. You won't want to be that kind of piper so soon.

3. If you could ever run into New York City—Where the devil is Kearny, N. J.?—you can take lessons from Angus M. Frazer, 314 West 43rd St. One dollar and a half per hour.

If you propose to buy a set of pipes you could

do no better than have auld Angus go along with you to select your instrument.

It is probable, in fact, that Frazer might have on hand a second hand set on commission sale. For a hundred dollars you could get a really good second hand set. I personally would prefer to pick up a well seasoned set of pipes that I knew than buy them off a shelf in a store.

4. Drums. I like drums. I am very fond of good drum playing—African war drums; Hindu coolie drums; Indian ceremonial drums; any drums that beat a rhythm and have something to say. But the utterly accursed rattle and bang of snare-drums and a big double-whacker are a pestilence grafted on to bagpipe bands by their military association.

Another truism among pipers is that any fool can play in a bagpipe band because the drums drown out his mistakes anyway.

It is unfortunately true that the antics of a large person dressed in kilts and a leopardskin who twirls drumsticks around his busby add to the attractiveness of a bagpipe band in a parade.

As such, drums were added to military bands when Highland regiments were formed in the British army. Tradition and Scottish thickheadedness have carried the drum pest into civilian bands.

A point for you to keep in mind is that if you wish to take a flyer at piping and find yourself hesitating over the high cost of an instrument, you don't have to invest your money before you are sure that you really want to learn pipes. You begin practise on a practise chanter, an instrument fingered like the full piob mór but lacking the drones and bag. Such a chanter costs four or five dollars, and it is upon it that one learns all tunes before tackling them on the whole weapon.

And now I hope you go ahead and make an appointment with Angus Frazer.

Women On The Trail

OR WHAT the well dressed huntress should wear.

Request:—"I do a lot of hunting in Wisconsin in season. I would like to know about equipment for my wife on hunting trips. I hardly know what to get her to wear. I suppose breeches and high top boots like I wear are suitable, but I should appreciate your ideas on the subject."

—HARRY JACOBY, Madison, Wisconsin

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—From my own experience with women on the trail and in camp, I suggest that she dress much like yourself, although I have found that few women take kindly to long underwear of wool such as most men wear under such conditions. They are too warm and sweaty for heavy work, yet are more preventive of colds than cotton. Personally I would suggest that high topped boots be not used by a woman. They are too heavy and cumbersome, and sweat the legs, producing cold limbs and feet. Wool riding breeches are excellent and serviceable. Wool shirt and mackinaw such as you wear yourself, to fit. For stockings, she should wear heavy wool socks and also light weight rubber overshoes. Let me suggest, strange as it may sound, the use of silk stockings next to skin under the wool socks. They help keep the feet warm. I have found them very fine myself, especially as long as the feet can be kept reasonably dry. Rubber overshoes should be sufficiently large to permit wearing several pairs of wool socks, the number depending on the individual and how sensitive the feet are to cold.

Gold

TOOLS for the placer prospector.

Request:—"I will be pleased to receive information on the necessary outfit for placer prospecting."

—J. H. SKINNNER, Alberta, Canada

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Tools needed for ordinary placer prospecting include the goldpan, magnifying glass, magnet, pick and shovel, beside the camping outfit. Surface placer-working tools require besides these named: A few yards of chamois skin, for squeezing amalgam through to exclude excess mercury; a supply of quicksilver; a cast-iron retort for reducing the amalgam and condensing the vaporized mercury for further use. The button remaining in the retort is saleable at around $15 an ounce, the balance being paid when the gold is refined. I consider it wiser to pack into any new region merely the light prospecting tools at first. You must come out anyway to record your claims, at which time you'll be able to get tools for working which are adapted to the sort of deposit you've found. They differ.

Florida

LOOK out for cottonmouth moccasins when casting and trolling along the drainage canals.

Request:—"From your general experience what do you think would be the best tackle to buy for fishing the Florida drainage canals, both for casting and for trolling?"

—DONALD MARSHALL, Atlantic City, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. Hapsburg Liebe:—The principal fishing in Florida freshwater canals would be for large mouthed bass. For casting, I recommend Pflueger, South Bend, Shakespeare, and/or Heddon plugs (wooden minnows) and Al Foss porkrind baits. Porkrind baits sink faster than plugs, and are better when the water is a little warm on the surface and the fish deep. Use the darker colors of plugs for bright days and/or clear water; the

lighter colors for cloudy days and/or dark water. The water in these canals, incidentally, is apt to be "winey," so colored from roots and decaying vegetation.

You can troll with any "wiggler" plug, with a porkrind bait, with a spoon. See that the spoon is not too big—not a saltwater spoon, you know. Good wiggler plugs are the Pflueger Pal-O-Mine, the Shakespeare Tantalizer, and the South Bend Pike-Oreno. A first class "popping" (jerked on the surface) plug is the South Bend Bass-Oreno. Any good freshwater rod and reel will do. Equip the reel with at least 50 yards of 18- to 24-lb. *black silk line*, of a good quality and *not* old stock, since silk rots fast. Take along spare lines.

Especially in warm weather, look out for big cottonmouth moccasins along canals. They are sluggish, but their bite is bad. If you don't find the fishing good in the canals, try the lakes.

Jungle

AFRICA versus South America. Which is the more dangerous?

Request:—"1. What are the different animals of Brazil?

2. How does the Amazon jungle compare with the African jungle?

3. Are there any wild head-hunters or cannibals in these jungle now?

4. Are there any native negroes in South America, or are they all Indians?

5. How do the natives live in the jungles? What do they eat?

6. How far up the river is the Amazon River navigable?

7. Why is it that explorers seem to go to Africa instead of going to South America? Is there any outstanding reason?"

—T. F. STEVENS, Bethel, Connecticut.

Reply, by Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—1. In contrast to Africa, the distinguishing feature of Brazil is the absence of large animals and the fact that many of those that exist are climbing animals. There are over 50 kinds of monkeys. The puma, the Brazilian lion, is one of the biggest. I should have said above that the number of crocodiles in Brazil is enormous also. The jaguar, wolf, lizards, bats, the sloth, deer, tapir, the anteater, and others are representative.

2. The jungle itself is perhaps somewhat similar with exception of the animal life. I wouldn't be surprised if the fertility of the Brazilian jungle were not greater than that of Africa, giving it a denser and more luxuriant growth, but I am not sure.

3. Yes, there are head-hunters and cannibals in the interior of Brazil. Their shrunken head trophies can be seen at almost any museum.

4. The negroes of Brazil have all been imported from Africa; the aboriginal population is all Indian.

5. They live on fish, meat, fruit, and nuts, if they are nomads. Where they settle they eat manioc, corn and live in very primitive huts of mud and bamboo.

6. The Amazon is navigable for over two thousand miles—clear up to the Peruvian city of Iquitos.

7. I think the elephant and the lion attracted the explorer to Africa and the fact that the dangers there seemed to be greater. Now many more are going to Brazil and other parts of South America.

Sloop

SAILS from the dry goods store.

Request:—"1. What material is best for sails that can be purchased at an ordinary dry goods store?

2. Is 170 square feet of sail too much for a boat fifteen feet long by five and a half feet wide, with centerboard of about 90 pounds? (This is a centerboard sloop.)"

—S. W. MONTEITH, Elkhart, Indiana

Reply, by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—1. I believe that unbleached muslin or airplane cloth are probably the best material for sails available in the average dry goods store.

2. 170 sq. ft. of sail is plenty for a 15-foot boat. 150 might be better and more comfortable unless your average wind is not very stiff.

Hillbilly

HE HEARS the honk of the auto as often as the tinkle of the cowbell.

Request:—"I am taking the liberty of writing to you for information regarding the mountain districts of Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina.

Are there still very isolated districts such as the late Fiswoode Tarleton wrote about in *Adventure,* remote from railroads, having unpaved roads, where few people have seen automobiles, radios or trains? If so, where approximately are they located?

What counties would you suggest visiting to afford one a view of life that has not changed much in the last decade or two?

Which are the most favorable months for such a tour?

Are the people tolerant of strangers? Hospitable?

About how long would one hundred dollars last once I was on the scene?"

—JOHN GOTTHARD, The Bronx, New York

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—While a few such isolated communities as those of which Fiswoode Tarleton wrote still exist, I am at a loss to tell you exactly where to look for them. Parts

of southeastern Kentucky, from which Tarleton drew a portion of his material, are not safe for the visitor at present, for they are having labor troubles in the coal fields of that section now, and any "furriner" (outsider) is looked upon with suspicion by both sides and can with no fault on his side become entangled in serious trouble.

The last one or two decades have brought more changes to the mountain people than have the fifty years before, for the automobile and good roads, going hand in hand, have penetrated even into the deepest, most hidden coves, and the touch with modern civilization has changed the daily life and outlook of the native mountaineers.

In many places I could call by name, ten years ago a "dryland sled" was the only vehicle that could traverse the roads (?). Now the honk of the auto is more often heard than the tinkle of the cowbell. And the schoolhouses hidden away in the valleys have done much to change the viewpoint of the boys and girls, and give to them a craving for some of the comforts and advantages of the outside world.

IF YOU will read Tarleton's stories carefully you can discern the underlying thought that the advance of civilization was swiftly wiping out the old ways and manners that had persisted unchanged for generations. Tarleton possessed a wonderfully accurate insight into the mind of the mountaineer and his reaction to different stimuli, and his local color and dialect, though sometimes a little exaggerated, as all fiction-writing must be, is the best I have ever read.

There never were more hospitable people than the Southern mountaineers, so long as one approached them on a basis of equality; but they are sensitive, and any suspicion that the outlander thinks himself a little superior could easily develop hostility. And it was generally best for the visitor to attend to his own affairs and not attempt to pry into those of his hosts.

Much has been written of the gaunt, homespun clad mountaineer who met the traveler with a gruff "Halt! Whar ye goin'?" emphasizing his challenge by the thrust forward of the muzzle of his rifle, and of the shot from ambush. That's all baloney, so far as the innocent traveler is concerned. I've tramped for thousands of miles among these hills, into the wildest, most inaccessible places I could find, and while I have had a friendly warning or two to stay out of certain hollows, the only sign of hostility I have ever encountered was a shot or two at our camp one night, and that, as we later found out, was an outbreak of drunken bravado. The ordinary wayfarer is safer on mountain roads than he is on city streets.

If one starts exploring, poking back into secluded spots in the Cumberlands or along the Tennessee-North Carolina border, he can find isolated cabins where the conditions you mention exist today, but few, if any, communities. Summer or early Fall would be the best time to explore, and the hundred dollars you mention could last from one to three months, depending on how you traveled and what class of accommodations you desired.

Ducks

RAISING Pekins in Samoa.

Request:—"The raising of ducks in the United States and in Canada is done on a commercial basis. The species of duck raised for this purpose is the Pekin. They develop in 10 weeks to 7 and 8 lbs, ready for the market. I have had considerable luck in raising ducks and intend to continue it—and am interested in the duck business abroad as well as at home.

Do domesticated ducks actually thrive on the Island of Samoa? Are the people fond of ducks as a food? Is there a refrigerating plant on the island?"

—SIGMUND PIOTROWSKI, St. Louis, Missouri

Reply, by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—The Pekin duck is also the popular and profitable duck all over New Zealand. They also have the breed over in the Samoan Islands. But it is the Chinese coolies, not the Samoan natives, who do the breeding and rearing for sale. The Samoans do not go in for duck breeding, either for domestic use or for export. There is a refrigerating plant at Apia, the chief town of that portion of the Samoas governed from New Zealand.

Calumet

"BREAK the red stone from this quarry,
Mold and make it into Peace-Pipes,
Take the reeds that grow beside you,
Deck them with your brightest feathers,
Smoke the calumet together
And as brothers live henceforward!"
—From *"Hiawatha"*

Request:—"I like to smoke a pipe more or less, and recently became curious about the Indian peace pipe of history, thinking that I should like to obtain one for actual use if this is practical to use and at the same time available.

As I know nothing of Indian pipes I thought perhaps I could get advice on how to get a genuine pipe made by the Indians and information on which type they have that would be best suited.

Boiling the whole thing down, I want a real honest to goodness Indian pipe that I can use. The story that goes with it will be all the better if it's historic."

—W. D. WALLACE, Detroit, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. H. F. Robinson:—The Indians of the Southwest do not use pipes, excepting occasionally in ceremonies—they use the cigaret en-

tirely. Pipes among the Indians generally are made of many substances. Stone, baked clay, bone, wood and metal. The latter usually was the tomahawk and pipe combined, where the head of the hatchet had the hollow for the tobacco, connected with a hole through the handle. This would allow the Indian to dispense with carrying a pipe when on trips.

If you will go to your public library and ask for The Handbook of the American Indian, published by the Bureau of American Ethnology as Bulletin 30, in the second volume at pages 257 *et seq.* you will find quite an article on the various kinds of pipes.

Now as to getting something of that kind yourself. Would suggest that you try and get one of the Minnesota Pipestone pipes. You may remember, it is this kind of pipe and the only quarry in the world where they get this stone that is written about in "Hiawatha." Write to the Superintendent of the U. S. Indian School at Pipestone, Minn. and ask him to turn your request over to a trader or an Indian who may be able to get you one of the pipes. Would suggest, as you want to get one for actual use, that you specify that the pipe shall have a wooden stem.

The Northwestern section of the United States (Oregon and Washington) is now covered by Mr. Frank Winch, 544 Roosevelt Building, Los Angeles, California.

Our Experts— They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. *It is in no sense an employment bureau.*
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 536 Park St., Chicago, Illinois.

Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, New Jersey.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago. Ill.

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Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

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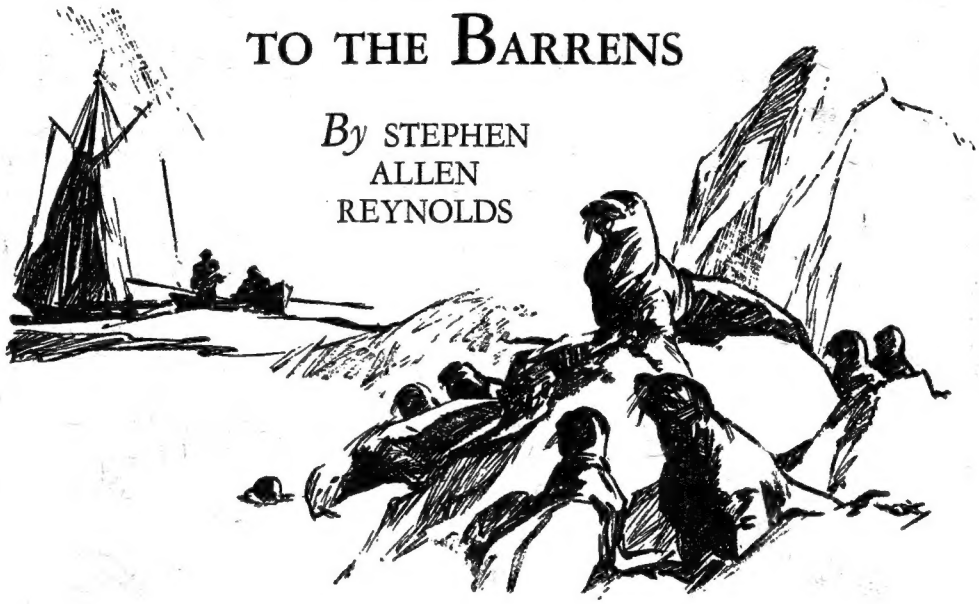

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